

The New York Crook-Catcher's Curious Case!

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Thad Burr's Death Drop; or, The Clue of the S. S. S.

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AUTHOR OF THE "DETECTIVE BURR" NOVELS, "THE MATCHLESS DETECTIVE," ETC., ETC.



ALTHOUGH HIS COMPANION HAD BEEN FELLED, THAD STOOD FIRM AND DEFIANT. "SURRENDER!" HE DEMANDED.

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CHAPTER I.

AMONG STRANGERS.

DETECTIVE THAD BURR was too well accustomed to unusual occurrences to be surprised at anything. Otherwise he might have been surprised on returning home late one night to find a stranger awaiting him.

Not on account of the appearance of the stranger, for there was nothing extraordinary in his appearance; nor on account of the lateness of the hour, although it was after two o'clock in the morning; but because most people with business with the Secret Service go to the Police Headquarters, or at least to the office of Superintendent Byrnes.

But it was not the first time that the Detective Special had been called upon by persons with mysteries to unravel—people who had been attracted by the great spotter's wide-spread fame;—hence he was not surprised.

As soon as Thad entered his door his servant informed him somewhat confidentially, as was his wont under such circumstances, that there was a gentleman in the parlor waiting to see him.

"And his business must be pretty urgent," added the attendant, "for he's been here more than two hours. Of course, we didn't know where to find you, sir, or we should have sent for you or sent him to you."

"Why didn't you suggest to him that he should go to Headquarters?" asked Burr, a trifle impatiently.

"So I did, sir, but he said he wanted to see you personally."

The detective waited for no further explanation, but walked into his parlor at once.

The stranger arose from his seat to meet him.

"This is Detective Burr, I presume?" observed the man, advancing to meet him, with outstretched hand.

"It is," replied Burr, taking the proffered hand.

"My name is Aspinall," continued the stranger. "I have called upon you, Mr. Burr, relative to a very strange case which is in your line."

"I am accustomed to strange cases, sir," smiled the crime-hunter.

"So I should imagine, and from what I have heard, you have been remarkably successful with them."

"Thank you."

"The case which I wished to consult you about—"

"Pardon me, Mr. Aspinall," interrupted Burr. "Let us go into my private office. I always like to do my work in the workshop."

So saying, he led the way into a small room off the rear end of the hall, which the detective had fitted up for, and used as, an office and consulting room.

When the two men were seated in this little apartment, Burr lighted a cigar and, offering the stranger one, which he declined, the detective tilted himself back into an easy position, and opened the interview with a—

"Now, sir!"

Burr took occasion to study the stranger a little more carefully.

He saw that he was a small, nervous man, with dark complexion, jet-black hair and Van Dyke beard, and eyes exceedingly black and brilliant—not what would be called sinister eyes, by any means; yet there was something in their restlessness and apparent impatience to see all there was in your face at once and get away, that it gave the detective a strange sensation—a feeling that there was something wrong about the man. His hands and feet were as small and shapely as those of a lady.

He was richly and fashionably dressed, entirely in black, the only fault to be found with his attire being a rather over-abundance of jewelry, especially diamonds. But from

appearances they were genuine, and seemed to indicate that the owner was a man of means.

Thad's first impression was that he was a Cuban or Spaniard, from the darkness of his skin; but, if he was a foreigner, he had evidently resided in the United States a long time, for his English was faultless.

"The case of which I wish to speak is this," began the stranger: "I came over in the American Line Steamer New York, which arrived in port yesterday morning. On the first day out from Southampton I made the acquaintance of a gentleman by the name of Summerville, an Englishman by birth but a resident of this country. He belonged somewhere in the West, I believe. I soon found that he was a man of means and extensive information, having traveled nearly all over the world, and we became friends. He was alone on the steamer, as also was I, and we fraternized at once."

"It was only natural, under the circumstances, that we should stop at the same hotel on our arrival in New York, and we put up at the Astor House."

"We occupied adjoining apartments; but, both having business to attend to, we saw nothing of each other yesterday until last night, at dinner. My friend appeared to be in his usual spirits and related a number of incidents that had occurred to him during the day, some of which were exceedingly comical and we laughed over them."

"After dinner, having nothing else to do, we went to the theater together, after which we took supper together, and then returned to the hotel, where we arrived about midnight. We parted almost immediately afterward, each retiring to his own apartments and, whatever he did, I went directly to bed. I had scarcely done so, however, when my late companion's man came to my apartments and informed me that his master had met with a serious accident. He did not state what the nature of the accident was, but when I reached my friend's room I found him in bed, unconscious and to all appearances dead."

"The hotel people were notified, a doctor summoned and finally the police called in—the latter only after the doctor had pronounced the case suicide. I was not satisfied with that assumption, however, and asked to be directed to a detective, when I was recommended to come to you, sir, and that is why I am here."

The stranger had recited his story in an easy, matter-of-fact manner and in an even, dispassionate tone, as though he had been reading it from a printed page. Meanwhile his black, restless eyes darted alternately from one object to another all over the room, but rarely resting for a single instant in any one place, and only once or twice encountering the eyes of the detective.

When he had finished speaking Thad scrutinized him calmly for a moment, and then asked:

"What led to the doctor's opinion of suicide?"

"That I am unable to explain. All I know is, that, after examining the body, he first pronounced Mr. Summerville dead, and when asked what he thought had caused death, he said it was through the agency of some subtle poison, the nature of which could not be determined without an autopsy, and that it was his opinion the deceased had taken his own life. The police were then notified. An inquest will doubtless be held in the morning, but, in the mean time, I thought it wise to have a clever crime investigator look into the matter."

Thad could not help wondering at the man's haste in the case, but did not express himself, and asked:

"Were there any empty bottles or anything in the room that indicated suicide by poisoning?"

"That I could not say. As soon as the physician arrived he took possession—he and the hotel people, and afterward the police, and I was barred from any opportunity of investigating, even if I had been so inclined, but to tell the truth, I was too much flurried to think of any such thing. Ah, sir," he sighed (and this was the first symptom of emotion he had exhibited), "it is an awful thing for a man, even a suicide, to die among strangers like that!"

"What, may I ask, was your reason for

dissatisfaction with the verdict of suicide," asked Burr, disregarding his last observation, "not knowing but the doctor's opinion was well grounded?"

This question appeared to stagger the stranger for an instant, and he gazed inquiringly into the detective's eyes for a single moment before replying.

"The fact is," he said at length, and he seemed rather to be communing with himself than addressing any one, "I could not conceive how a man of my friend's cheerful temperament, with wealth and everything to make a man happy, could take his own life. I do not say that I do not believe the doctor's opinion well grounded. In fact, I have not so much as an opinion in the matter. I am completely mystified. But I deem it better to have a competent person, unbiased by the conflicting views expressed on every side, which is so common in such cases, and uninfluenced by the excitement incident to the same, to investigate the case before whatever clues which might exist are destroyed by bunglers. Am I not right, sir?"

"Perhaps you are. But, what do you desire me to do? Do you wish to employ me as a private detective on the case? And if so, are you willing to compensate me for my services? Mind, I am not in the habit of asking these questions, but you must remember this case is a peculiar one. As you have already said, it is already in the hands of the police. The Police Department is dominated by one of the most efficient detectives in the world, and he will detail his most competent men to ferret the mystery—if there is any mystery connected with it; and I shall not be surprised, in fact, if he calls upon me to work upon the case. In which event I should either be compelled to explain to him that I was already working the case on my own account, or formulate some excuse for declining to work upon it under him."

The stranger appeared to reflect a moment, and then said:

"You are attached to the regular detective force then, I take it?"

"Not exactly; although I am frequently employed by Superintendent Byrnes upon important cases, I am an independent detective."

"Nevertheless, you would be willing to take charge of the case in the event of my insuring you adequate compensation?"

"Certainly. That is my privilege, and I am at your service."

Aspinall was again silent for some moments, his restless eyes meanwhile had become fixed upon some object on the floor and he appeared to be plunged in deep thought.

Finally, he looked up and resumed:

"Well, I guess you had better go on. And," he pursued, taking a large pocket-book from an inside pocket, opening it and counting out a hundred dollars, which he handed to the detective, "here is a small retainer. As soon as you have made any progress in the case call upon me at the hotel. Here is my card, and" (he took out a pencil and wrote something on the card), "the number of my room, as you will see by this, is 65. It is on the first floor above the office. Will you call at the hotel to-night?"

"It will be as well, I presume."

"Very well. I will accompany you, if you have no objection."

"I shall be most happy," replied Thad, rising.

Stopping long enough to notify his wife that he had been called out on business, the crime-tracer, accompanied by the stranger, left the house.

A brisk walk of ten minutes brought them to the Thirty-third street station of the Sixth Avenue Elevated Road, where they took a down-town train, and in about fifteen minutes were at the Astor House.

The excitement incident to the discovery of the alleged suicide had pretty well subsided. The crowd of morbidly curious people had been dispersed by the police, and, with the exception of half a dozen reporters, who stood about taking notes and making inquiries, the police in charge were all that were to be seen.

A short, whispered conversation with one of the officers in charge secured Thad's admission to the room where the dead man lay, and he began his investigation.

Nothing had been disturbed in the room, and the detective had the advantage of finding everything just as it had been when the tragedy occurred.

The deceased was a large, portly man of fifty or thereabouts, of a commanding appearance and unmistakable English cast of features, even to the "mutton-chop" whiskers, which were plentifully mixed with gray. The skin had already begun to undergo the discoloration peculiar to death by poisoning, and was of a greenish-yellow tinge.

This fact appeared to bear out the physician's theory that the man had been poisoned, and the detective cast his eyes about in search of a vial or package which had contained the poison, but was disappointed at finding none.

However he concluded that the articles in question had been taken charge of by the police, and ceased to bother his head in that direction.

Thad withdrew the sheet which covered the body and made a careful examination of the body for any marks of violence. This he did more from a force of habit than any hope of discovering anything, as he had already come to believe with the doctor that the man had met his death by poison, and was about ready to accept the theory that the poison had been administered by the deceased's own hands. The sight of any bottle or package which had contained the poison would have convinced him and he would undoubtedly have abandoned the case there and then. It was only the absence of these and the possible doubt of their existence that induced him to pursue his investigations.

Finally, having gone pretty well over the dead man's anatomy and having discovered nothing, he was on the point of re-covering the body, when his attention was attracted by a small scarlet mark or scar on the left temple.

The mark was no larger than an old silver five-cent piece and had been concealed by the hair falling down over it, and it was by the merest accident that this had been brushed aside in such a way as to reveal the peculiar mark.

At first glance it had the appearance of a birth-mark, but a closer scrutiny showed it to be an artificial mark or brand, placed there, apparently, by some process of tattooing, with a remarkably brilliant red India ink.

Nothing more could be discerned with the naked eye, but the detective was not satisfied with this, and produced a powerful lens which he always carried in his pocket.

Lighting a match and holding it so as to bring out the mark in the strongest relief and placing the lens over it, he was surprised at what he saw.

The mark or brand, now magnified to the size of a silver half-dollar, was seen to be covered with an intricate scroll-work, over which were distinctly visible the letters "SSS" linked and twined together like so many serpents.

"This is very strange," mused the detective. "However, it may not have anything to do with the man's death. Still, it will not be amiss to remember the thing."

He therefore made a memorandum of the strange discovery, and a rude drawing of the mark in his note-book.

He next opened the deceased's trunk with a skeleton key and spent more than an hour in examining its contents, but found nothing that threw any light upon the man's mysterious death or his past life.

With a feeling of disappointment he closed the lid of the trunk, and cast his eyes about for something else, when he espied the dead man's coat—evidently the one he had taken off upon retiring—hanging upon the wall.

A search of the pockets resulted in finding them absolutely empty. Evidently the police had been through them, and the detective began to think his investigation was at an end, when his eye fell upon an envelope lying on the bed and partially concealed by the bedclothing. On opening this he made a discovery that caused his heart to give a great bound.

In the upper left-hand corner on the letter was a fac-simile of the brand of the dead

man's temple! It was rudely drawn in scarlet ink, and underneath was written:

"The time cometh for every leaf to fall."
Yours hath come.

"SSS."

CHAPTER II.

THE VAILED WOMAN.

THAD put the letter into his pocket without mentioning the fact of his discovery to the policeman in charge, and then made inquiry concerning the dead man's valet.

No better illustration could be had of the confidence that the police put in the theory of suicide than the fact that the valet had not been arrested, and was at that moment snoring lustily in one of the rooms constituting the suite.

It was now nearly five o'clock in the morning; nevertheless Thad was not willing to leave the place until he had gleaned all the information possible, and therefore awoke the valet.

This serving-man was a typical English "tiger" with a broad cockney accent.

He was a short, thickset man with a ruddy complexion and a superabundance of self-conceit.

He was not over-well pleased at being disturbed in his slumbers, and at first refused to answer the questions put to him, but, when the detective impressed upon him the danger of being locked in a cell for refusing to answer, he consented, in a dogged spirit.

"Were you still up when your master returned home?" was Thad's first question.

"Hi was, sir," growled the valet, as he sat up in bed, rubbing his bleared eyes. "Hi halways stays hup till 'e comes 'ome."

"Was he alone when he entered the room?"

"'E was, sir."

"And no one called upon him after that, I presume?"

"No, sir."

"I am to understand, then, that he saw no one after returning to the room."

"Hi didn't say that."

"I mean aside from yourself."

"Hi didn't say as 'ow 'e didn't see no one hexcept meself, sir," returned the fellow sullenly.

"You mean to say, then, that he *did* see some one?"

"Per'aps."

"Come, answer my question, sir!" commanded the detective, savagely. "Did he or did he not see any one besides yourself after entering the room?"

The fellow frowned and was silent until Thad repeated the question with the addition of a threat to have him locked up at once if he did not answer.

"No one but 'er, sir," he finally made out to falter in so low a tone that the detective could hardly hear what he said.

"Her? Whom?" asked Thad in great surprise.

"His it necessary to hanswer that, sir?" inquired the valet, looking up with a scared countenance.

"It is, most necessary, I can assure you!"

The serving-man hung his head and was silent.

"Answer my question, sir, at once, or I shall be compelled to lock you up!"

"W'y, sir, the lady as—" and he stopped, inquiringly.

"The lady that what?"

"Really, sir, Hi don't know 'oo she is. Hi seen 'er several times haboard ship, but Hi never 'eard 'er name, hand has she was halways close vailed, Hi never 'ad a chance to see 'er face."

"And she called upon Mr. Summerville last night after his return from the theater, did she?"

"No, sir, she was 'ere w'en 'e came in."

"Then she called some time before?"

"Habout two hours before. She came habout ten o'clock."

"And waited till he returned?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was she vailed this time?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did she state what her business was with your master?"

"No, sir."

"What did she say when you told her that he was out?"

"She didn't say nothink."

"Did she not ask what time he would return?"

"Ho, yes, she awsked w'en 'e was likely to return, and Hi told 'er as 'ow Hi didn't know, and then she said as 'ow she'd wait, and Hi gave 'er a chair."

"What did she do to pass the time all that while?"

"Nothink. She just sat there like a statco, hand never so much has moved or winked so far has Hi knows, though Hi couldn't say has to that, has she 'ad 'er vail hover 'er face hall the time."

"How did he greet her upon coming in?"

"Sir?"

"What kind of a reception did he give her on coming in? Did he greet her cordially, as though he were glad to meet her, or was the meeting cold and formal?"

"'E said 'good-evenin',' and shook 'er 'and, and hafter that 'e sat down alongside of 'er and they began to talk bin a w'isper."

"You did not hear what was said, then?"

"No, sir."

"What were their actions?"

"That Hi couldn't say neither, for the simple reason that has soon has me mawster sat down 'e told me as 'ow Hi could go, and Hi went to me room at once."

"Did you go to bed directly?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because Hi didn't know but me mawster would want me hagain before goin' to bed."

"And did he finally call you?"

"No, sir; but Hi 'adn't been bin me room long before Hi 'eard 'im groanin' like hanythink, and Hi went to 'im."

"Was he in bed when you reached his room?"

"No, sir; 'e'd fainted and was lyin' hon the floor."

"So you undressed him and put him to bed, eh?"

"Hi did."

"Was the woman still there?"

"No, sir; she'd gone."

"Did Mr. Summerville recover enough to tell you what had happened?"

"'E did not, sir."

"Did you notice any bottle or vial about, which might have contained poison?"

"No, sir. 'Owever, Hi didn't take time to look."

"What did you do?"

"Hi went to the room hof Mr. Haspinall and told 'im me mawster 'ad met with an haccident, and then they sent for a doctor and the police, and watnot, and Hi wasn't ballowed to henter the room, hexcept to pass through to me hown room."

"Had this woman called upon Mr. Summerville before since his arrival in New York?"

"She called about noon, but has Hi told 'er me mawster was hout and would not return before night, she went away, and Hi saw no more hof 'er till the time Hi spoke hof."

"Do you know anything about what relations this woman bore to Mr. Summerville?"

"Hi do not."

"Did you never hear him speak of her?"

"No, sir."

"Your master was a married man, was he not?"

"So 'e was, sir."

"Had he ever any trouble with his family, so far as you know?"

"Not as Hi knows of."

"Or any of his relatives?"

"Hif 'e 'ad Hi never 'eard of it."

"Where did he live?"

"Hin Cheecago."

"That will do."

Leaving the valet to resume his nap, Thad Burr repaired to the rooms of Aspinall.

To his surprise Thad found that gentleman still up as if waiting for him. He was reading when he entered the room.

"Well, sir, what is the result of your investigations?" was Aspinall's first question.

"Nothing worth mentioning," replied Thad.

"Did you find anything which confirmed the theory of suicide?"

"On the contrary, what little I did succeed in finding leads me to believe that your friend did not take his own life."

"What was it?" asked the little man, jumping to his feet excitedly.

"I am sorry to say that I must keep my discovery a secret for the present," rejoined the detective.

The little man sunk back in his chair with a look of disappointment in his dark face.

"Later I shall tell you all, no doubt," Thad hastened to add. "But for the present you will pardon me for declining to tell even you. I deem this necessary for the ultimate success of the case."

"Very well," observed the little man dejectedly. "I presume it is professional, and I shouldn't grumble. It will be useless for me to ask you anything about what progress you have made, I presume?"

"No. On the contrary, I will tell you a good part of what I have ascertained."

Aspinall brightened up at once. "Well?" he cried eagerly.

"In the first place, I want to tell you that I questioned the valet, and learned from him that Mr. Summerville had a caller after his return from the theater."

"Eh?" in surprise, and the little man was upon his feet again.

"Or rather, I should say a caller was waiting for him when he reached the room."

"After he left me?"

"Undoubtedly."

"The deuce! Who was it?"

"That is what I am at a loss to discover. Perhaps you can throw some light upon the mystery."

"I?" and he opened his eyes very wide and stared at the detective in amazement.

"Yes. The valet says that a woman wearing a veil came to the room about ten o'clock and waited until your friend returned. That, when he (the valet) left the room, they were engaged in confidential conversation, and that about twenty minutes later he was alarmed by hearing his master groaning, and on going to his room, found him unconscious on the floor. He also says that he had seen this same woman several times during the voyage over, but that she was veiled, and he never either saw her face or heard her name. Can you throw any light upon the subject, sir?"

While the detective had been speaking the little man had sunk back into his chair, and was now sitting gazing at the detective with a bewildered countenance.

When Thad had ceased speaking the little man drawled reflectively:

"A veiled woman? Where have I seen her? Oh, I have it!" he exclaimed suddenly. "It was on board the steamer. I saw her speaking to my friend on two different occasions."

"Did he ever refer to the matter while in conversation with you, sir?"

"No, not directly. I spoke to him about it in a spirit of railery, and asked him if he had been making a mash, to which he replied, laughingly, that she was a widow, and if I recollect, he said that she was in some trouble and he was advising her or in some way trying to help her out of her trouble. I have forgotten what it was now."

"You have not seen her since your arrival in this country, have you?"

"No, sir. In fact, she had completely gone out of my mind, and had you not spoken of her, it is not likely that I should ever have thought of her again. Do you imagine she had anything to do with my friend's taking off?"

"I am not prepared to advance a theory, but the fact of her being in the room with the deceased not to exceed twenty minutes before his death looks suspicious, to say the least."

"So it does, and we must find this mysterious woman at all hazards. Did Ferguson know where she was stopping?"

"Ferguson?"

"The valet."

"Oh! No, he professed to know nothing whatever about her. He says that he had seen her in Mr. Summerville's company on several occasions while on board the ship, but that he never heard his master speak of her in any manner whatever. Yes, we must find her above all things. You will be here at the hotel for a few days, I presume?"

"For a week longer, at least."

"Well, I will ask you to keep your eyes open, and if you should catch sight of this mysterious personage, put a spy on her

track who will keep her in sight for a while, and in the mean while notify me. In my opinion she knows more about this business than any one else."

"That is my opinion, too, sir, and I shall take pleasure in doing as you suggest."

"Thank you. Now, there is another matter in which you may be able to help me. In the course of any of your conversations with your late friend did he ever tell you anything concerning his family?"

"Oh, yes; he told me a good deal about them, in one way and another. He told me that he had two lovely daughters, sixteen and eighteen years old respectively, and that he also had three or four sons—I have forgotten how many, only I recall that he said one was married and in business in Chicago."

"Mr. Summerville lived in Chicago, I believe?"

"So I understood."

"Did he ever speak of any trouble existing between himself and any of his family or relatives?"

"Never. On the contrary, his conversation in regard to them led me to infer that the most happy relations existed between him and his relatives. In fact he was just the man to possess and retain a host of friends, and you could not even imagine him having an enemy in the world."

"That is one thing I was about to ask you, whether he ever spoke of an enemy who he feared might some time do him an injury?"

"He never did."

"Well," said the detective, rising, "we can do no more in the matter just now, and I will go. It is now long after daylight and you haven't been to bed yet."

"That does not matter," replied the little man feelingly. "There shall be no sleep for me until something definite is discovered relative to this terrible mystery."

"I presume the police have notified your friend's folks, and that some of them will be on after the body by this evening. Perhaps they can throw some light on the subject."

Five minutes later Thad walked down the broad steps of the Astor House to Broadway. The sidewalk was already thronged with men and women hurrying to their respective places of business or work. The detective began making his way through the throng, when, chancing to glance backward toward the hotel entrance, he was astonished to see a closely-veiled woman hurriedly descending the steps!

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

THE instant Thad espied the veiled woman he was satisfied that she was none other than the mysterious woman he had heard about, and made an effort to reach her.

The crowd was such, however, that he was hustled and elbowed first in one direction and then another, so that it took him several minutes to work his way back to the foot of the stairs.

And by the time he had reached it the woman had mingled in the multitude and disappeared.

In vain he mounted the stairs in order to bring himself above the heads of the mob, and strain his eyes in the endeavor to catch a glimpse of her; she was nowhere to be seen.

He realized the folly of attempting to search her out in that human hive. While he would be working his way in one direction she would in all probability be gaining distance in another.

Finally he abandoned all hope of seeing her, and then it occurred to him to return up-stairs and inform Aspinall of what he had seen.

He quickly mounted the two pairs of stairs and knocked at room 65, on the second floor.

The little man had apparently changed his mind in regard to not sleeping before the mystery was cleared up, for there was no response to his knock.

Thad repeated his knock, but, again, there was no response. A third time he thumped upon the door, and with considerable vigor.

Still, no response, and he hammered the door a half-dozen times in rapid succession, but all to no purpose.

If the man was in there he was evidently in a remarkably deep slumber.

Finally it occurred to him to peep through

the keyhole, when to his surprise, he saw that the key was out.

Just then one of the chambermaids came along and glanced at him curiously.

"Do you know whether the gentleman who occupies this room has gone out or not?" asked the detective.

By way of reply the chambermaid applied her eye to the keyhole.

"The key's out, anyway," she said.

"So I perceive. But, might he not have taken it out without leaving the room?"

"He might, but gintlemen don't ginerally take their keys out unless they do be goin' out, an' thin they laves the key at the offis. But Oi'll soon foind out if he's in or not."

With that she knocked and at the same time took hold of the knob and rattled it vigorously.

As that did not have the desired result, she selected a key from the bunch she carried at her belt and fitted it into the lock.

The next instant the door was opened and the detective stepped into the room.

As he had half feared, there was no one there.

"Whoy," ejaculated the astonished woman, "the gintlemen must 'a' wint lasht noight."

"Why?"

"Because, don't yez see the bed's niver been occypoid?"

"That is nothing. I happen to know that he did not go last night. In fact, he was here not more than half an hour ago."

"An' he didn't go to bed all noight?"

Thad did not heed the remark, for his attention was drawn in another direction.

He had been looking about the apartment, and had discovered that there was no trunk, valise, or in fact anything to indicate that anybody occupied the room.

"By Jove! I believe he has gone for good!" he remarked half musingly.

"If he hasn't, he must 'a' come without baggage," responded the chambermaid, who had made the same discovery.

"This is strange," mused the detective.

"Och, sure, an' its no uncommon thing for gintlemen to come widout baggage," observed the woman, thinking he alluded to her last remark. "Annyway yez kin foind out at the offis if he's gone or not."

Without another word, but profiting by the woman's suggestion, the detective made his way at once to the office and made inquiry regarding the late occupant of 65.

"Sixty-five?" droned the sleepy clerk, glancing at the key-board. "Sixty-five's in his room."

"I'm sorry to dispute you, but he is not in his room."

"He must be. His key's not here."

And the clerk fell to writing in a book, apparently having forgotten Thad's existence.

Seeing that nothing was to be gained there, the detective turned away.

He then thought of the valet, and it occurred to him that there was a possibility that he might know something about the mysterious little man.

When he reached the room he found the flunky asleep and was a little more ill tempered at being disturbed than before, if possible.

However, by dint of scolding and threatening he was induced to answer the questions put to him, but it all resulted in nothing for the detective. The valet had seen nothing of Aspinall since the detective had conferred with him, and Thad left the man to his slumbers once more and made his way to the street.

Realizing that nothing more could be done for the present, and being fatigued and faint with hunger, Thad called a cab and had himself driven to his home on Thirty-fourth street, between Ninth and Tenth avenues.

He arrived just as the family were sitting down to breakfast, and, after making a hasty toilet, joined them.

While he was still at the table the morning's mail arrived, and among others, he received a quaint square little envelope, the superscription of which was in red ink.

A thrill almost akin to a horror ran over him at sight of the handwriting, which was a peculiar back-hand, and the same as that used in the letter he had found on the dead man's bed.

With nervous fingers he tore the envelope, and found the following letter:

"DETECTIVE BURR:—

"DEAR SIR:—I understand you are working upon the case of the man who was found dead last night in the Astor House. Take a friend's advice, and let it alone. The man committed suicide—there is no doubt of it—and all your work and cunning will result in establishing no other theory. At the same time, you may get yourself into a good deal of trouble. Hence I repeat, take a friend's advice and let it alone. Respectfully,

"SSS."

The inevitable scarlet brand adorned the upper left-hand corner of the paper, and the handwriting was undoubtedly the same as that of the note he had found in the room.

The detective special was puzzled.

He entertained no fear of the hinted threat, but the letter, written so soon after he had gone to work upon the case, proved that the writer was not far off, and his mind at once reverted to the veiled woman.

The thought of her also caused him to think of the little man, and somehow he could not help associating the two in some mysterious way.

In the first place, how could the woman have known that he was employed upon the case unless the little man had told her? In fact, how could anybody have known it without deriving their information from him, as he was the only living mortal in possession of such knowledge? Even the valet, whom he had questioned, could only have guessed vaguely that he was in some way connected with the Police Department, but even he did not know the detective's name.

Among the other letters he had received was one from Superintendent Byrnes, requesting to see him.

That put all idea of sleep out of the detective's head, and as soon as he had finished his breakfast he put off for the Mulberry street office of the superintendent.

Thad reached the office so early that he was compelled to wait some time for the superintendent.

The latter soon arrived, however, and was surprised to find the detective there.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, Thad," remarked Byrnes. "If I had any idea you would have come so early I would have been on hand sooner myself."

"Better late than never is an old and true adage," laughed Thad. "What's in the wind, superintendent?"

"Sit down, and I'll tell you," returned Byrnes, seating himself and pushing a chair toward the detective.

When both were seated the superintendent tilted his chair back, as is his fashion, took a long pull at his cigar, blew out a long, meditative whiff, of smoke, and began:

"When I wrote you, Thad, it was for the purpose of seeing you regarding one case, but now that you are here, I want to talk to you about another."

Burr regarded him with a puzzled expression, for he had had no other thought than that the superintendent wanted to consult him about the Astor House tragedy, but now that he came to think of it, he realized that the letter must have been written before the tragedy occurred, or at least before the superintendent could have heard about it.

"You have read in the morning papers, of course, about the affair at the Astor House, Thad?" pursued the superintendent.

Thad smiled. The question was amusing to him, who had spent the entire night investigating the case, and knew more about it than any living person, outside of the murderer—supposing it to have been murder.

Nevertheless he did not deem it polite to mention the fact just then, and replied:

"Yes, I have heard about it."

"What is your theory, or have you formed a theory yet?"

"Scarcely. It is rather early, don't you think so?"

"Rather, but some of the boys have already done so. McLaughlin scoffs at the doctor's theory of suicide, and thinks we ought to look into it, regardless of the coro-

ner's verdict, which will doubtless be suicide."

"It would perhaps be as well."

"We will wait until we see what the coroner's jury says, but in the mean time we might have our eyes about us for clues,—don't you think so?"

"Perhaps. But, what leads Mack to think that the doctor's theory is wrong?"

"Only one point, so far as I can learn."

"And that is?"

"That no bottle or package which had contained poison was found in the room, and as the dead man's valet had seen him alive and well not more than twenty minutes before he found him dead, it would have been impossible for him to have taken the poison before he entered the room, it would seem."

The detective involuntarily started.

The matter of the bottles had worried him a good deal, and now that he had ascertained for certain that no bottles had been there when the dead man was discovered by the police, his theory was confirmed.

"How came the doctor to jump at the theory of suicide, if no bottles were found?" he asked innocently.

"That is what puzzles me. I can only attribute it to stupidity on the doctor's part."

"And how is it that, having rejected the doctor's theory, McLaughlin failed to arrest the valet?"

"I believe he said that the valet's simplicity and obvious ignorance of all knowledge of the case convinced him of his innocence."

"Did McLaughlin question the valet?"

"I believe he did."

"What did he learn?"

"Very little, I believe, beyond the fact that he had seen his employer enter the room alive and apparently well something like twenty minutes before he found him in a dying condition."

"H'm! He did not learn that any other person was in the room twenty minutes before the man was found dead?"

"Certainly not. There was nobody there except the servant."

"Did the valet tell him that?"

"I don't know that he told him that, but as he said nothing about anyone being there, I presume the inspector took it for granted."

Thad laughed.

"That is a new one on me," cried Thad.

"What's that?"

"A detective taking anything for granted."

"It is a little irregular. But, what are you driving at, Thad? I believe you know more about this case than any of us."

The detective laughed again.

"Perhaps I do," he said. "At least I know that the dead man was not alone at the time the valet last saw him alive, and I am surprised that McLaughlin should not have heard of it."

The superintendent stared at him in astonishment for several seconds before replying.

"What do you mean, Thad?" he finally gasped.

"Just what I say."

"That there *was* somebody else present besides the servant?"

"I do."

"How do you know this?"

"The man-servant told me."

"The deuce!"

"That is why I am surprised that Mack, having questioned the fellow, did not learn of the fact."

"You astonish me, Thad. When did you question the valet?"

"About three this morning."

The detective then related the circumstance of Aspinall coming to his house to notify him of the affair and his (Thad's) subsequent investigations, but omitting to mention anything about the scarlet brand and the two letters bearing the same.

"There is no use of talking, there is no such thing as getting ahead of you, Thad," exclaimed Byrnes at the conclusion. "I had thought to tell you something new, and here you know more about it than I do myself. By the way, what do you propose to do, go on and work the case for this Aspinall?"

"That depends upon circumstances. From all appearances he has left the diggins,

in which case, I shall work the case only so far as he has compensated me, after which I will continue it under your or the city's auspices, if such service is desired."

"Very well, Thad. Go on and see what you can make out of it, and if this friend does not compensate you the city will."

It was not far from noon when the detective left the superintendent's office, and he concluded to pay another visit to the Astor House.

The little man was still absent and nobody about the hotel had seen him during the day.

The coroner had been there, examined the body, impaneled a jury and adjourned the inquest until the following day in order to collect all the evidence possible.

Meanwhile he had given his consent for the body to be removed and it had been taken to an undertaker's.

The dead man's valet had been arrested and was locked up.

Seeing that nothing else could be learned before the arrival of the deceased's friends, the detective went home.

CHAPTER IV.

STILL GROPING.

ABOUT eight o'clock that evening the detective called at the Astor House again.

He made inquiry in the office regarding the arrival of the friends of the dead man, and was informed that some one had arrived, although the clerk did not know what had become of him.

Thad turned to leave the office, when he came almost plump upon Aspinall, who was coming in with his usual precipitateness.

So astonished was the detective at seeing the little man, that he did not notice that he was accompanied by another—a tall, handsome young fellow.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Burr?" cried Aspinall, grasping Thad by the hand. "Mr. Burr, let me introduce you to my young friend, Mr. Summerville," he went on, turning to the tall man behind him. "Mr. Summerville, this is Detective Burr, the gentleman of whom I spoke to you as having charge of your father's case."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Summerville," observed Thad.

"I am happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Burr," returned the other.

"This is a bad piece of business, Mr. Summerville," continued the detective.

"Indeed, it is, and a most sorrowful one for us. We—"

"Come, gentlemen," interrupted Aspinall, "let us go to my room, where we can discuss in private;" and the little man wheeled, shot out of the door and was soon mounting the stairs to the next floor, followed by Thad and young Summerville.

Soon they were in Aspinall's room and the door closed and locked.

"Now," said he, when they were all seated, "we can talk this matter over without fear of being spied upon, for we cannot tell what eager ears may be floating in the air. In the first place, let me ask Mr. Burr what progress he has made."

"Very little since I saw you," replied Thad, eying the little man closely, for he had not recovered from his surprise at seeing him so suddenly after supposing that he had decamped for good.

"Haven't run upon a clue yet, eh?"

"Hardly what you could call one. I caught a glimpse of the mysterious woman leaving the hotel a few minutes after I left you this morning, but lost her in the crowd on the street."

"You did?" exclaimed Aspinall in great surprise.

"Yes. And as soon as I discovered that it was useless to follow her I returned here for the purpose of notifying you, when, to my surprise, you were gone. I confess that I was at a loss to understand it."

The little man laughed.

"I don't wonder at it. The fact is, I had not been feeling well all night—you know that I did not retire—and about the time you left I was suddenly taken with cramps, and hurried out to find a drug store to get something to give me relief."

Thad eyed him harder than ever, for he did not believe a word of the story!

And he was still more convinced that the little man had invented the excuse when, in attempting to catch his eye, the detective found that he evaded him.

"I am surprised that I should not have seen you," observed Thad, dryly, "as I was going out the same way at the same time, and remained in the vicinity of the entrance for some minutes looking for the veiled woman!"

"Oh, I was in such a hurry that I could have passed you a dozen times without your noticing me," rejoined Aspinall, with visible desperation, and growing terribly agitated.

"Possibly. But I was back here about noon, and still you were not here."

"That is not strange," replied Aspinall, with an effort at calmness. "That fact is, I had urgent business up-town, so that as soon as I found relief from my illness I put off up there. I got back only a few minutes before Mr. Summerville arrived. So, you have made no progress to speak of?"

"Scarcely."

"I presume we will have to accept the doctor's theory of suicide after all," sighed the little man with a far-away look in his eyes.

"We can hardly do that now, I think."

"Why?"

"Haven't you heard that the authorities have taken the matter up, and have arrested the valet?"

The little man turned pale in spite of his attempt at indifference and coolness.

"No! Is that true?" he cried, in an agitated voice. "But," he went on in a calmer tone, "you see I was away all day, and too busy to notice what was going on outside of my own affairs. So they have put Furguson under arrest, have they?"

"So I believe."

"Caesar! I wonder if they won't be nabbing me next?"

"It would not surprise me," rejoined the detective, coolly, still trying to catch the other's eye, but in vain.

"That would be a fine state of affairs," continued Aspinall, with an attempt at levity and with a forced laugh. "Only two days in the country, and arrested for murder!"

There was an awkward silence for a moment; then the little man suddenly arose and said:

"Will you gentlemen excuse me for a moment? I feel that pain returning. I will be back in a few minutes."

And before either of the others had time to reply, he had opened the door and disappeared.

A silence of several minutes' duration followed his departure, and then Thad asked:

"Mr. Summerville, have you known this man long?"

"Not to exceed two hours, I think. He sent me the dispatch to Chicago apprising us of father's death, and he met me here when I arrived. He accompanied me to the undertaker's where the body was prepared for shipment, and we had just returned when you came in."

"You know nothing of his antecedents, then?"

"Nothing whatever."

"You do not know whether your father had any dealings with him or not?"

"I do not. I do not know whether my father ever knew him or not. All I know is what he tells me about making my father's acquaintance on board the New York on the passage from Southampton."

"How does he impress you?"

"He appears to be a gentleman—a little eccentric, perhaps, but a gentleman."

"Perhaps he is; but, to be frank with you, I do not like his actions. But we will not discuss that now. Mr. Summerville, had your father any enemies, so far as you know?"

"Not one in the world—so far as I know."

"There was no person with an old grudge, for instance?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"You never heard him speak of any old affair—say in his youth, did you?"

"What kind of an affair?"

"Any kind—love, for example."

"Never. Why do you ask?"

The detective reflected a moment and then resumed:

"Mr. Summerville, as you are a son of the murdered man—and I am satisfied now that he was murdered—I am going to make a confidant of you, on the condition that you promise me whatever I tell you shall go no further, and above all, shall not be mentioned to this man."

The young man opened his eyes very wide.

"You astonish me, sir!" he ejaculated.

"No doubt. But, do you agree to the terms?" persisted the detective solemnly.

"Then you suspect this man?"

"I did not say so. I only ask you not to divulge what I am about to tell you, for the present. Do you promise?"

"Why, certainly—if you desire it," replied the young man reluctantly. "But, I cannot understand why you should not wish to confide in Aspinall. It was he that employed you upon the case, and it was he that notified us of our father's death."

"Nevertheless, I deem it prudent—for the present, at least—not to confide in him to the extent of telling him what I have discovered in connection with the case, and shall divulge them to you only on condition that he is not to know anything about it."

Summerville reflected a moment, and then said:

"Well, you have my promise, Mr. Burr."

The detective took the letter he had found in the murdered man's room from his pocket and, folding it so that only the scarlet brand in the corner could be seen, held it so that the light from the gas jet overhead fell upon it.

"Did you ever see anything like that, Mr. Summerville?" he asked.

The young man started convulsively and turned pale.

"My God! yes! Where did it come from?"

The two men had risen and were standing side by side under the gas.

As the young man uttered the exclamation he clutched the detective's arm hysterically, and Thad could feel his hand tremble violently.

"You have seen it?" asked Thad, disregarding the young man's question.

"Yes. My God, yes!"

"Where?"

Summerville sunk into his seat, and mopped the cold perspiration from his brow.

"Sit down!" he muttered in little more than a whisper, "and I will tell you about it."

The detective resumed his seat, and the young man went on:

"It was years ago—I was little more than a child—that I was passing through one of those narrow lanes in the neighborhood of Holborn in London, just after dark, when, suddenly, a man stepped out of a dark recess and caught hold of me. I was too badly frightened to scream, but I struggled with all my might and finally succeeded in getting away and ran at the top of my speed.

"When I reached home I related the incident to my father, who was greatly excited over it, and immediately took me to the light where he examined my temple. The moment he did so, he sunk into a chair, covered his face with his hands and groaned. I asked him what was the matter, to which he replied: 'It is there, my boy! It is there!' 'What?' I asked. 'Your death mark!' he cried. 'The Scarlet Brand! Either you or some of us will die inside of a year!' My father would never explain any more to me; but, sure enough, my brother died suddenly a few months later, apparently from poisoning. Nobody ever knew who administered the poison, but there was a small mark—not larger than an American five-cent piece, on his temple, blood-red, and when subjected to the microscope, it was an exact fac-simile of that on the letter you have."

"And your father would never explain the mystery?"

"No. But he told us that whenever that mark appeared on a letter sent to us, or was discovered on any part of our body—it would probably appear on the temple, he said—it was a sure harbinger of our death."

"What became of the mark upon your temple?"

The young man brushed the hair back from his temple and said:

"Look!"

Thad examined the temple, and, sure enough, there was the exact blood-red spot he had discovered on the dead man's temple!

Nor was he satisfied until he had placed his microscope over it and examined the mark thoroughly.

Yes, it was the same. There was the intricate scroll-work, surmounted with the three mysterious letters, "SSS."

"And yet you still live," remarked the detective, as he renewed his seat.

"Yes, it appears that my time has not yet arrived. But, it is only a matter of time, I suppose."

"And yet, you told me just now that your father had no enemies, so far as you know."

"So far as I know—he had not. I never understood this mystery, and when you spoke of enemies my mind did not revert to it. I do not remember whether my father ever told me or whether I received the impression in some other way, but I have always understood that the thing had been going on in the family for several generations."

"There must have existed a vendetta, then?"

"I presume so—something of that kind."

"It is a wonder your father had not lived in mortal dread with such a fate hanging over him."

"So he did, while we lived in England, but since coming to this country, he appeared to have forgotten all about it, and was as cheerful as any man you would wish to meet."

"He has not been molested since coming here, then?"

"No, sir."

"I should infer, then, that this is a family feud or vendetta, and that your enemies reside on the other side of the water, and that his recent visit had stirred them up afresh."

"That is probably true. But, tell me, did you examine my father's body?"

"I did."

"And did you discover anything of this kind on it?"

"Yes."

"On the temple?"

"Yes."

The young man covered his face with his hands, and groaned aloud.

"There is no need of investigating the case any further, then," he murmured, in a broken voice.

"Perhaps, there is."

"No. It will be time thrown away and risking your own life. I know how my father met his death, and all your detective work can never result in finding out any more."

"You know how your father met his death?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"By the hand of this unseen agency."

"Oh, I know that much myself. But, who is this unseen agency?"

"God alone knows, and no man can ever discover."

"Don't be too sure of that."

"Eh?"

The young man looked up and scrutinized the detective's face, as though in doubt whether he had heard aright.

"If you will intrust the case to me and provide me with ample means, I believe I can discover who the perpetrators are."

"Do you really think so?"

"I do. I have never failed in a case, and I do not see why I should in this one."

The young man jumped to his feet and grasped the detective's hand.

"If you will clear up this mystery, sir," he exclaimed, enthusiastically, "you shall be handsomely rewarded. The moment you have unearthed the vendetta, or whatever it is, you shall have fifty thousand dollars, and I will sign a bond to that effect before I take the train for Chicago to-night!"

"It is a bargain," replied Thad, calmly. "And as a stand-off to your generosity, I will defray my own expenses and expect nothing until the work is done. But I wonder what has become of our friend Aspinall."

Nearly an hour had elapsed, and still the little man had not yet returned.

CHAPTER V.

A SOLEMN COMPACT.

WHEN Thad alluded to the absence of Aspinall young Summerville started and changed color.

"I wonder what it can mean?" he faltered in a faint voice.

"I am unable to say," returned the detective. "But in my opinion it means exactly just what his absence this morning meant."

"What was that?"

"I do not know, of course, and may be suspecting the man without ground, but in my opinion his absence from the hotel from about half-past five in the morning until six or seven in the evening may be explained by what he said just before he went out awhile ago."

"Fear of arrest?"

"That is it."

Summerville was silent and studied the carpet for some moments.

"Now that you mention it, I do remember that he appeared quite nervous when you hinted that he might be arrested. But, what can he have to do with the case? You certainly do not suspect that he is in any way guilty of or accessory to the murder?"

"I can only judge a man by his actions."

"But if he were guilty, why should he have employed you upon the case, not to mention his telegraphing the news of my father's death to us?"

"If you had had my experience with criminals, Mr. Summerville, you would not ask that question. It is an old dodge to employ a detective or notify the police. I have known men to spend immense sums of money to ferret out a crime of which they themselves were guilty."

"Is it possible?"

"Indeed, it is."

"What is their motive?"

"They imagine it will have the effect of distracting attention from themselves, I presume."

"Still, it is hard for me to believe that Mr. Aspinall is such a man."

"How do you account for his prolonged absence, when he promised to be back in a few minutes?"

"He may have been delayed. He certainly would not decamp entirely."

"What is to hinder him?"

"Well, one thing, his baggage—"

"Look about you," interrupted Thad. "There is not a particle of baggage of any description in the room."

"He must have removed it during the day," suggested the young man, glancing about the room.

"No, there was nothing here this morning."

"That does look a little suspicious. But," he went on with a sudden inspiration, after a pause, "you say that he left the hotel while you were about the entrance this morning. How do you account for the fact that you did not see him?"

"If you remember, I told you and him that I had seen the veiled woman leave the hotel?"

"Yes. But, what has that to do with this man?"

"It may have nothing to do with him, and it may have a good deal."

"How?"

"Did you never hear of men dressing in women's clothes?"

"Heavens!"

"You remember the woman was always veiled, so that even the valet had never seen her face."

"Then, you think it possible that the veiled woman and Aspinall are one and the same?"

"I do not say that I think so, but, that is the only solution I can think of, of the sudden and mysterious appearance the veiled woman and the mysterious disappearance of Aspinall without my seeing him as he left the hotel."

The young man was plunged in deep thought for some moments.

At length he consulted his watch thoughtfully.

"Half-past nine," he mused. "My train goes at ten-thirty. I have but an hour to settle matters and reach the depot," he went

on, rising. "If your conjectures are correct, Mr. Burr, there is little doubt that this man is the guilty party. Do the best you can with the case, and I will reward you as I promised. If you will come with me, we will go somewhere where we can draw up a bond to that effect."

"That will not be necessary," rejoined the detective. "If you give me your word as a gentleman that you will fulfill your part of the compact, I am satisfied."

"I give you my solemn word of honor as a gentleman that you shall have fifty thousand dollars the moment you unearth this mystery," said Summerville, grasping Thad's hand warmly.

"And that you will render whatever other aid, moral or financial, that may be necessary and within your power?"

"I do."

"Then it is a solemn compact."

"It is, sir. Farewell. Wire me the first intelligence you have in connection with the case. Here is my address," he continued, handing the detective his card.

"Good-by, Mr. Summerville. You shall hear from me as soon as I have made any progress."

Thad had at first thought of accompanying the young man, but upon second thought he had decided to remain in the room awhile longer, in the hope that Aspinall might return.

Summerville reached the door and opened it, when he suddenly stepped back and closed it again, glanced back at the detective with a very white face and beckoned him to come.

In an instant Thad was at his side, and the young man threw open the door again.

Thad peered out eagerly, but seeing nothing, looked at his companion for an explanation.

"She's gone!" he gasped.

"Who's gone?" demanded the detective impatiently.

"The woman—the veiled woman!"

"Was—was she there?" faltered Thad, still straining his eyes along the dimly lighted hall.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Right here in front of the door! It is a wonder she could have made her escape so quickly."

"Right in front of the door?"

"Yes."

"Then she had been listening to our conversation, depend upon it! We must find her, if she is in the house."

With that the detective bounded out of the door and, a moment later, was descending the stairs at a rapid gait.

So rapid was his descent, in fact, that the woman would have traveled pretty rapidly, even with the start she had, to have reached the sidewalk before he did.

And yet when he did reach the street there was no woman, much less a veiled one, in sight.

There were very few people on the street at that time in the evening, and if she had been anywhere about he must have seen her.

There was a possibility of her having cut across the three-cornered square toward the post-office and lost herself among the throng of street-cars that are constantly jammed in there, but that was hardly likely, inasmuch as she could not have known that she was being followed.

The detective retraced his steps up-stairs again.

He was surprised on reaching the second floor not to see anything of young Summerville in the hall where he had left him.

He paused to look about the halls, when he was attracted by talking in the room he had just quitted a moment before.

Without a moment's hesitation he opened the door, when to his utter astonishment, he found Aspinall and young Summerville standing there engaged in conversation.

Thad was dumfounded.

Aspinall smiled and greeted the detective cordially, as though he had not left the room for ten minutes and remained away an hour and a half.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting so long, Mr. Burr," he explained, pleasantly, "but when I got down-stairs I met a man whom I am doing some business with and whom I could not find to-day. I tried to induce him to come up-stairs but he pretend-

ed to be in too great a hurry. Nevertheless he kept me standing on the sidewalk for over an hour. You know there are such men."

"When did you come up?" asked Thad, disregarding his harangue.

"Just this instant."

"That is strange, Mr. Aspinall," observed Thad doubtfully. "I have just been down and up the stairs, and I'll take my oath I did not meet a single soul either way."

The little man laughed merrily.

"I am not surprised at that, Mr. Burr," he said. "I saw you on your way down, but you were in too great a hurry to see any one. You have had another glimpse of the mysterious veiled woman, my young friend here tells me."

"No matter how much of a hurry I was in," pursued Thad testily, still adhering to the original subject. "I am positive that no one passed me on the stairs, either going or coming."

The little man laughed again.

"That is good—very good!" he laughed.

"I must have had on my invisible coat."

Thad was on the point of telling him that he had had on a remarkably visible coat, and that of a female, but after a little consideration, he deemed it advisable not to divulge his suspicions, as it might interfere with his future plans.

And then before he had time to formulate any sort of reply to the little man's remark, Summerville broke in with:

"Well, gentlemen, I must leave you. I will have no more than time enough to reach my train."

And hastily grasping the two men's hands in turn, he was hurrying away, when Thad said:

"I will accompany you part of the way, Mr. Summerville, as I go in that direction."

"I shall be pleased to have you," rejoined Summerville.

Simply bowing to Aspinall and bidding him good-night, Thad left the hotel with the young man.

"We can walk across and take the Third Avenue Elevated," observed the detective, when they were on the street. "That will take you directly to the Grand Central Depot."

"Very well, if it will get me there in time."

"Plenty of time."

They struck across the square and walked in silence for some distance.

At length Thad spoke.

"I am more convinced than ever that that fellow is playing a double game."

"Why?"

"It would have been utterly impossible for him to have come up-stairs while I was going down without my seeing him."

"How do you imagine he got up, then?"

"He did not get up."

"Eh?"

"He never was down."

"You think he was concealed up-stairs all the time, then?"

"No, not all the time. A good part of the time he was in front of the door listening to our conversation."

"I don't understand."

Thad nearly lost his patience at the fellow's apparent or real stupidity.

"Hang it, man, didn't I tell you that the veiled woman and Aspinall were one and the same?"

"So you did."

"Now is it clear?"

"The woman whom I saw in front of the door was none other than Aspinall in disguise, you think?"

"I am positive of it."

"Where could he have disappeared to, do you suppose?"

"That I cannot tell, but I shall find out. In my opinion he has another room on the same floor, where he can dodge in and change his disguise at will."

"That seems feasible."

"It is the only rational solution of the mystery of the woman's sudden disappearance and his sudden appearance."

By this time they had reached the Elevated station and entered a car.

"What had he to say when he returned to the room?" asked Thad, after they were seated in the car.

"Nothing more than you heard. He was

telling me about meeting a gentleman with whom he was doing some business."

"He did not refer to the case in any way?"

"He hadn't time. We had just got inside the room and he had told me about the party he had met, when you came in upon us. By the way, if you suspect him of being what you say, I should have thought you would have remained in the hotel and watched him."

"I have a better plan."

"What is that?"

"As soon as I get to the depot I shall take a cab and drive home, where I will disguise myself and return to the hotel. In that way I can keep my eyes upon the fellow without his knowing it."

"That is an excellent idea."

"There was one matter which I neglected to mention to you," pursued the detective, after a pause.

"What is that?" asked the young man.

"When I reached home this morning I received a letter warning me against working upon this case."

"You did?" ejaculated Summerville, excitedly.

"Yes, and it was in the same handwriting as the one which your father received."

"Horrors!"

"And it was marked with the same scarlet brand in the upper left-hand corner."

"My God! Then your doom is sealed, sir!" exclaimed the young man, greatly agitated. "You had better abandon the case at once."

"Not for worlds. I am more determined than ever to ferret this thing out, and I shall do it if it costs me my life."

"It will cost you your life!"

The voice came from the seat directly behind them, apparently, and both men turned on the impulse and looked back, but to their utter astonishment nobody was there except a gray-bearded old man, and he was sound asleep.

At first Thad thought the sound might have come from the seat beyond, but only a couple of young girls were there, and the voice was too deep and sepulchral for them to have uttered it.

He glanced at the young man and saw that his face was ghastly with terror, and he shook like an aspen leaf.

"It is very strange," muttered the detective.

"It is strange," faltered the young man, in a broken voice. "What can it mean?"

"Some trick of a ventriloquist," replied Thad, with remarkable calmness considering the circumstances. "There is nothing to fear."

"On the contrary, there is everything to fear," murmured Summerville. "For God's sake, abandon the case!"

"Abandon the case!" came the same mysterious voice.

CHAPTER VI.

THE VOICE OF DOOM.

WHEN Thad Burr heard the mysterious voice the second time, he was unable to treat the matter lightly.

The owner of the voice might have been a practical joker, but coming as it did in connection with so many other mysteries, he could not but believe it a serious matter.

He could no longer believe it the work of a ventriloquist, from the fact that his own remarks had been in too low a tone to be heard even in the next seat.

The decrepit old man still slept peacefully, and no one looking at the unconscious face could have accused the man of trickery.

A glance at his companion showed him that the young man was worse frightened than ever, and when he found the detective looking at him, he muttered in a hoarse whisper:

"For God's sake, abandon the case, Mr. Burr, if you value your life!"

"If you value your life!" repeated the mysterious voice.

Even the brave detective experienced a qualm of terror at this third repetition of the ghostly voice, but he refrained from expressing it to his companion.

By this time they had reached Forty-second street and the two men hurried from the train.

The Grand Central branch of the road soon landed them at the depot, and as Summerville's train was ready to go, he took a hasty leave of the detective and ran for the train.

As he hurried away, however, he called back in an impressive voice:

"Better abandon the case, Mr. Burr," to which he added something that sounded like "if you value your life," but the noise of the train-dispatchers and the hurrying throng drowned his voice.

Thad stood for an instant looking after the retreating figure, and listening expectantly for the prophetic voice to repeat the young man's last words, but it did not come, and he was about to turn away, when his attention was directed to a person hastening through the gate.

It was the identical old man he had seen in the Elevated train and who sat immediately behind him and his companion!

The detective experienced an unpleasant sensation.

His mind at once reverted to the little man whom he had left at the Astor House.

But a second thought convinced him that it could not be he, even in disguise, for how could he have reached the train as soon as they, after disguising himself?

The detective cast the matter from his mind and left the depot.

When he reached the street he secured a cab and had himself driven home.

As soon as he reached the house he hurried at once to his room, and was not long in transforming himself into an old man with an ample gray beard and flowing snowy locks.

He then returned to the cab, which he had ordered to wait for him, and in fifteen minutes pulled up at the Astor House.

Mounting the two flights of stairs with a speed and agility that seemed miraculous for a man of his apparent age, he went directly to room 65, and knocked at the door.

But, although he repeated the summons a half dozen times, there came no response.

Tiring at last of attempting to arouse the occupant of the room, and having peered in at the key-hole and discovered that either the key was in the lock or that the room was in darkness, Thad returned to the office and made inquiry.

"Sixty-five?" droned the drowsy night-clerk, glancing sleepily back at the key-board. "Sixty-five's out."

"Nearly time for him to be back, isn't it?" queried Thad, looking up at the clock which pointed at a quarter to twelve.

"Yes—if he's coming back to-night," grumbled the clerk.

Here he glanced indifferently at his ledger.

"Sixty-five's gone—left the house," he added.

"What time did he go?" asked Thad eagerly.

"After supper."

That was definite.

The detective had seen him after ten.

Then a terrible suspicion seized him.

What, after all, if the old gray-beard had been he?

That seemed impossible, and yet there was little doubt in the detective's mind that the little man had gone to Chicago, and he trembled for the fate of young Summerville.

And then another thought occurred to him.

"Have you noticed a lady stopping here, or hanging about here, who always goes veiled, clerk?" he asked.

"There was such a person here," replied the clerk, "but she went to-night."

"She occupied a room on the same floor with Aspinall, did she not?"

"Sixty-seven," replied the clerk.

"Sixty-seven?" mused Thad. "That is next door to Aspinall's room. That accounts for the suddenness with which he was able to disappear in one character and reappear in another."

The following day the coroner held his inquest, and when the evidence was in and had been examined, the jury brought in a verdict of suicide, whereupon Fergusson, the valet, was released.

That same evening Thad received another letter written in the same hand and in red ink, and adorned with the scarlet brand, which ran as follows:

"DETECTIVE BURR:—

"DEAR SIR:—As you probably know by this time, the coroner's jury have confirmed my prediction, that they would bring in a verdict of suicide. Now what are you going to do? Continue probing at this case, and endangering your life, or take my advice and drop it? You had better do the latter, or, as I told you in the Elevated train last night, *it will cost you your life!*

"Faithfully,
"SSS."

The envelope was postmarked New York, which showed that if Aspinall was the author of the letter he was still in the city, or was when it was written.

The detective was sorely puzzled.

The same mail brought him a letter from Superintendent Byrnes, which was as follows:

"DEAR THAD:—

"As you have doubtless seen, the coroner's jury brings in a verdict of suicide. Do as you like about continuing on the case. It will probably be as well, however, to drop it, unless the parties you spoke of are willing to pay for having it probed a little further.

"McLaughlin is satisfied, after hearing the evidence, that the man took his own life, and he is probably right.

"Very truly,
"BYRNES."

"Well," mused the detective, "if I should listen to the majority, friends and enemies alike, I certainly would drop the case at once. But I shall take the advice of neither. I am more than ever determined to go to the bottom of this thing, if, as my ghostly adviser says, it costs me my life. I am a trifle too stubborn to give it up at this stage of the game."

However, he concluded to call upon the superintendent and have a talk with him about the matter.

The chief was just about leaving the office when the detective reached there.

"Hello, Thad!" cried Byrnes. "Did you get my letter?"

"Just this moment received it, superintendent," replied Burr.

"Well, what are you going to do?"

"Fight it!"

Byrnes laughed.

"Just what I told Mack," he said. "I told him that you would not give in on the strength of the coroner's verdict."

"Why should I, with all the evidence the other way?"

"You don't agree with the coroner then?"

"Hardly. I'm astonished at the verdict, and am unable to account for it."

"It is one of those things no one can understand, Thad."

"I should say so. How did they reconcile the theory of suicide with the absence of any bottle or package that might have contained poison?"

"They decided that the man had stopped in a drug store and taken the poison and then hastened to his room, where he died soon after."

"Quite a likely story! Did they have an autopsy?"

"Yes."

"What was the poison?"

"Corrosive sublimate."

"The deuce!"

"What's the matter, Thad?"

The detective had appeared greatly agitated for an instant, after which his countenance took on an expression of disappointment.

"I don't know but the coroner was right after all," he observed, musingly.

This was a great surprise to the superintendent.

"Why, what's come over you, Thad, to change your mind so suddenly?" he asked.

"The intelligence that the man had taken corrosive sublimate."

"Well?" with a puzzled countenance.

"There is a possibility, I say, that the coroner was right, and also a possibility that the man's death was the result of an accident."

The superintendent was more mystified than ever.

"Explain, Thad, do," he insisted.

Instead of doing so at once, the detective asked:

"Were there not some letters or papers found in the dead man's pocket?"

"Yes."

"Did they throw no light upon the case?"

"I believe not."

"Was there not a letter from a physician or apothecary, or prescription, or some other document or bit of writing that showed or indicated that the man had been under treatment of some kind?"

The superintendent was silent and thoughtful for some moments, and finally said:

"The things taken from the man's pockets are here, Thad. They are to be bundled up and sent to the family to-morrow, but there is no harm in your looking at them while they are here."

With that Byrnes touched an electric annunciator, and when the attendant appeared, the superintendent said:

"Flynn, fetch that package of papers that were brought from the coroner this afternoon."

"The wan marked Summerville—She-caggy, sor?"

"That's it."

The attendant withdrew, and soon returned with a package of miscellaneous odds and ends, such as a man will accumulate in his pockets, and laid it down on the table in front of the two men.

"There you are, old man," remarked Byrnes. "Wade into them and see what you can find."

"It did not take the detective long to go through the package, which consisted for the most part of correspondence, principally on business.

He had about exhausted the pile, when he suddenly came upon something that caused him to stop, assume a thoughtful expression and set to examining it minutely.

The chief, who had been watching him curiously all this time, bent over to catch a glimpse of the object.

"What have you struck, Thad?" he asked.

But at the same instant catching sight of the inscription on the envelope which the detective held in his hand, he laughed.

"Calomel," he read. "I say, Thad, you aren't going to have the man poisoned with calomel, I hope?"

"Why not?" asked Thad, a little tartly.

"You might have him salivated, but not poisoned."

"I am afraid you are a trifle weak in your chemistry, superintendent."

"How so?"

"You say that when the dead man was opened corrosive sublimate was found in his stomach."

"Yes—but not calomel," laughed Byrnes.

"Very well. This envelope contains calomel—simple, every-day, old-fashioned calomel. Now, suppose you mix an equal part of common table salt with it, what do you have?"

The superintendent opened his eyes.

"Why, I was not aware that you were a chemist, Thad," he laughed. "But what would result from the compound?"

"Corrosive sublimate."

"The devil!"

"The next thing to it. It is one of the most deadly poisons known to man. Now, my theory is this: The fact that the man was taking calomel, proves pretty clearly that he was afflicted with asthma, bronchitis or some liver trouble. The supposition is that with any of these complaints he was troubled at times with choking or coughing, and it is a common thing for people so afflicted to take a pinch of salt to clear the throat. Now, let us suppose that this gentleman at some time during the evening took a dose of calomel. On coming out of the theater into the cold air he caught a little fresh cold and began to cough. He still continued to cough until he reached his room, when he resorted to the old fashioned remedy, and took a pinch of salt. As soon as it had reached his stomach and assimilated with the calomel a chemical change took place, and the whole mass became corrosive sublimate, and the patient died in a few minutes."

"By George!" ejaculated the superintendent, "what a theorist you are, Thad! But is this tangible?"

"Ask any druggist with sense enough to put up a prescription."

"So you are satisfied with the verdict, and will abandon the case, eh?"

"Not by a jug full!"

"But you admit the possibility of suicide, or even accident."

"I do."

"Well, what have you got to work on?"

"While I admit the possibility, I do not admit the probability. There is a vast difference between the two."

"I comprehend; but why not probable?"

"In the first place, from all we can learn, the man was a perfectly-healthy person. There was no indication of consumption or any kindred disease about him. If he was taking the calomel, it was for a cold or some other trifling complaint, and he probably had no cough severe enough to cause him to take salt and, unless he had a hemorrhage, he would not be likely to take it in sufficient quantity to do him any injury."

"What is your theory, then?"

"That he was acting upon the advice of some one who understood chemistry, and who was bent upon his destruction. He probably had a cold and the so-called friend prescribed calomel. Probably this adviser told him that if he would add a teaspoonful of salt to the dose of calomel and take it before retiring he would be greatly benefited. Not suspecting that any harm could come from two such simple ingredients, he followed his friend's advice, and the result was fatal."

"However, this is all conjecture, Thad. And what is worse for your theory, there is wanting the very essential thing, motive. There is no evidence that the man had an enemy in the world."

"There is where you are all at fault," objected Thad.

With that he pulled out the letters of warning, adorned with the ominous scarlet brand, and handed them to the superintendent.

When he had examined them and heard the detective's explanation, he exclaimed:

"You've got a case, Thad, and they're all a lot of idiots!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE CURIOSITY SHOP.

In Third avenue, not very far from Tompkins Market, is a junk-shop kept by one Solomon Einstein.

The place is choked from the sidewalk in front to the uttermost limits at the rear with a miscellaneous collection of everything you could imagine, and more than you could catalogue in a lifetime from memory.

There is everything in the way of household goods, bric-a-brac, pictures, books, silverware and dishes, and all in the battered and decrepit stage, which appears to have been reached by the proprietor himself.

However, the proprietor is rarely to be seen about the place, the business being intrusted to a curious specimen of humanity who is about as dilapidated as the proprietor, but of a different persuasion.

In short, as his name indicates, and his small turned-up nose and broad upper lip (not to mention his broad brow) would prove at a glance, Michael Dougherty, or "Mike," as he is familiarly known, is a broth of a boy from the Emerald Isle.

Mike wears the national pride, the "sluggers" or neck-whiskers, which are plentifully sprinkled with gray, and from the wrinkled state of his face, which is not unlike a cocoanut in appearance, it is generally inferred by those who know him that he is somewhere on the sunny side of a hundred. But like the articles over which he presides, all reckoning of his origin, date and maker seems to have been lost, and he appears to have become part and parcel of the odds and ends in which he deals. The resemblance is heightened by the fact that Mike, like his wares, is wanting in one or two of his parts. There is not a pitcher in the shop that is not wanting of a handle or spout, or a table that is not short of a leg, and Mike has but one eye, and a finger or two of each hand is missing.

Personally Mike is gruff and unapproachable, so much so that he is the recognized terror of the small boys of the neighborhood. But when you once get to know him, and he becomes sufficiently acquainted with you to

no longer suspect that you are trying to conceal some of his valuables about your clothing, there is no more amiable or interesting person about the neighborhood.

He possesses a fund of knowledge relating to old wares, and will roll out anecdotes about curious customers by the hour.

Detective Burr was in the habit, when at leisure and he happened to be on this side of the town, of dropping in to have a chat with Mike and frequently picked up odd bits of bric-a-brac.

A day or two after his conversation with Superintendent Byrnes, the detective happened to be sauntering down Third avenue in the vicinity of the curiosity-shop, and dropped in.

The day was warm and business slow, and Mike was tucked away in a dark corner in a broken chair, dividing his time between dozing and pulling at a very short and very black pipe.

"Hullo, Mike!" called the man-hunter, as he stood in the doorway, shutting out whatever little light and air there might chance to steal into the dingy place with his huge form.

Mike, sullenly waking, and not being able to recognize the detective's face in the shadow, imagined him some of his idle tormentors, and was furious instantly.

"Git out wid yez!" he bawled, "or by me troth, Oi'll brain yez wid a flat-oiron!"

"Oh, you wouldn't do anything like that, would you, Mike?" laughed Thad, turning so that the light fell upon his face.

The old man, having hobbled over toward the door, rubbed his bleary old eyes and stared at the detective attentively for a moment, and then burst out:

"Begorra, Mr. Burr! an' is it yersilf, at all? Oi thought it was wan o' thim divvils that do be worryin' the loife out av me the whole toime. How air yez those days?"

"First-rate, Mike. How is it with yourself?"

"Wurra, bad enough, bad scran to the haird toimes! Oi do be loike an old pitcher wid a sthring around it—cut the sthring, an' Oi'll fall to paces entoirely."

"Anything new, Mike?"

"Not much. We do be gittin' in a little now an' thin an' sellin' a-moighty soight less, mores the pity."

With that Thad set to poking about among the old wares, picking up and examining a brass candlestick of curious workmanship, opening an old book, or turning over some other bit of forgotten wares.

Meanwhile Mike went about making a pretense at putting things in their places, as though anything had a place in that establishment.

Finally he said:

"Here's something Oi got in to-day, Mr. Burr, that moight interest yez."

As he spoke the man picked up a pair of holster pistols, such as were in use in the time of the Revolution and before.

They were silver-mounted and handsomely carved, and attracted the detective at once.

He was a connoisseur of curios, especially fire-arms.

The first thing that attracted his attention as he looked them over was the date—1762, under the maker's name, which was John Ludlow, and the place at which they were made—Sheffield, England.

"Rare old pistols," he mused as he turned them over reflectively. "Possibly they were carried by some of the gentlemanly highwaymen of the time, Mike."

"Mebbe so, sor," replied the Irishman, with a broad grin. "Qch, sor, they was rare ould b'ys in thim days!"

"So they were, Mike. A highwayman was a dandy in those days, and we detectives wouldn't have been in it with—what's this?"

"Phwat's phwat, sor?"

Thad was holding one of the pistols to the light and critically scrutinizing some mark he had discovered on it.

"Where did you get these, Mike?" he finally gasped.

"Sure, sor, Oi bought thim from a fella thot looked loike a bit av thramp."

"A tramp?"

"Faith, sor, he looked loike it annyway."

As the detective continued to examine the pistols, comparing one with the other, the old man became interested.

Finally when he saw him lay them down and take a letter out of his pocket, open it and compare something it contained with something he appeared to have found on the pistols, the old man became alarmed.

"Phwat is it, sor?" he asked eagerly. "They've not been sthole, Oi hope, sor!"

"You say you got these of a man who looked like a tramp, eh, Mike?" asked Thad, disregarding the old man's remarks.

"Yis, sor," replied the Irishman in a quavering voice. "But Oi didn't know, sor, that they was sthole, or Oi w'u'dn't 'a' touched 'em for anything."

"I am not aware that they were stolen, although they may have been. Still, that will make no difference to you. I will take the pistols at whatever price you think fit to charge."

"Ah, for the matter of that, Mr. Burr, yez kin have thim dirt ch'ape—foive dollars for the pair av them, an' Oi'm not makin' a cint, that's throe, sor."

"That's all right Mike," smiled the detective, handing him a five-dollar bill. "Although I'm afraid you're getting to be as much of a Jew as the old man himself."

"Howly saints forbid, sor! But axin' yer pairdon, phwat is it yez seen about the pistols that caused yez the worry jest now?" asked the old man, whose curiosity was aroused.

"Oh, nothing—a curious mark, that is all."

"A mairk loike something yez'd seen be-foor, eh?"

"Yes."

"Would yez moind pointin' it out to me, sor, so that if Oirun across any more wid that mark an Oi kin kape it for you?"

Thad had not thought of showing the old man the mark or telling him anything about it; but when he suggested that he might run across something else with the same mark on, he decided to take him into his confidence to some extent.

"Why, yes, Mike," he rejoined, stepping to the door and pointing at a mark carved on the silver mounting of the breech. "Do you see that circle with the fine scroll-work in it and the three S's?"

"Oi do," replied Mike, knitting his shaggy brows, squinting his old eyes and gazing at the mysterious sign.

"Well, that is a secret mark, and if you get hold of anything with that on, save it for me."

"Thot Oi will, sor," assured the old man, earnestly. "S, S, S! Phwat the divvil do that be sthandin' for? Siven silver six-pence?"

"No. 'Shot seven snoozers'," laughed Thad.

"Is that so?"

"As likely that as anything else. By the way, if the tramp or any person comes in here with an article with that mark on, use your best efforts to ascertain who he is and where he belongs. If you can learn anything about him or her, as the case may be, drop me a postal card to that effect and I will pay you well for it."

"Sure, sor, Oi'd not be chairgin' yez annything for the loikes av that."

"But it may result in bringing about a discovery which I am trying very hard to make, and if it does there will be a great reward in it, and you shall share it with me, Mike."

"Good, sor. If anny wan comes in here wid annything wid that mairk an it, he'll niver get out aloive till Oi knows all about him, from the toime av his first communion till the lasht dhrink he was afther takin'. Depind on me for that, sor."

"Very well. Do you think you would recognize the tramp whom you bought those of?"

"Oi would that."

"I'll tell you what to do."

"Wall?"

"If he comes in here again, make some excuse to go out, procure a small boy and give him a half-dollar to shadow the fellow and see where he goes. As soon as the boy returns and reports, send him with a message to me. Mind, you shall be well paid for your trouble and rewarded besides."

"Oi'll do it, sor. But moind, it's not the rewaird O'll be workin' for, but to accomy-date yez."

"I understand, but you shall receive the reward just the same."

"Thank yez koindly, sor."

Thad took his pistols, which Mike had wrapped up in an old newspaper, and went away.

Having some other matters to attend to, it was late in the afternoon before he reached home, and when he got there, he found a small boy waiting for him.

The boy handed the detective a note, which read as follows:

"Deer Mr. Byr

"deer Sor

"Sed Thramp was hear agane oi sint By afther him & By follyed sed Thramp Too his Destynashun so oi also sind By to yez as agrede yooors throoly

"michael Dougherty."

"Are you the boy that followed the tramp?" asked the crook-shadower, addressing the lad.

"Yes, sir," was the boy's reply.

"Where did you trace him to?"

"Over on Clinton street near East Broadway, sir."

"What kind of a place did he enter there?"

"Oh, it was er liquor store."

"A saloon?"

"Yep."

"Can you take me to the place?"

"Shure."

"Very well, come on."

Followed by the boy, the detective left the house, and when he reached Seventh avenue he hailed a passing cab and he and the lad got in.

"Clinton street, near East Broadway," said Thad, addressing the driver. "Do you know the number, my boy?" he continued, turning to the boy.

"Nope, but I'll tell yer w'en we git dere. See?"

"All right."

The cab sped away across-town to Broadway, and down Broadway to Seventh street, through Seventh street to Third avenue, and so on down this thoroughfare to where it runs into the Bowery and on down to where Clinton street intersects it, and in a few minutes more the boy looked out and said:

"Dere it is, mister."

As he spoke he pointed to a low saloon in a basement.

Thad stopped the cab and they alighted.

"Do you think you will know him when you see him, my boy?" he asked.

"Shure."

They walked along till they came to the saloon and entered it.

The place was thronged with a motley crowd of the lowest specimens of humanity to be found in the city, and the boy began peering about among them for his man.

Thad watched him curiously, and at length he saw him turn and beckon him to come.

The boy was on the opposite side of the big room, and the detective made his way across.

A rough-looking individual sat at a table with his head resting upon it, apparently asleep.

"Dat's de cove," whispered the boy, pointing to the sleeping individual.

"Are you sure?"

"Dead shure."

"Very well," rejoined the detective, slipping a dollar into the lad's hand. "You may go now."

"Thankee, sir," cried the lad gleefully, fondling the coin and grinning. "If youse wants me to do any more shadderin' I'm yer covey, sir."

Thad walked over and sat down on the opposite side of the table from his man and called a waiter.

"Give me a glass of beer, waiter," he said, "and ask my friend there what he will have."

The waiter looked from the detective to the ragged individual with an astonished expression, and finally shook the sleeping man. The fellow growled and uttered an oath.

"Vake oop!" shouted the waiter. "Your frient wants ye to take a trink mit him."

The fellow straightened up and stared at the detective with a dazed expression, and finally growled:

"He's no friend o' mine."

"Never mind," interposed Thad. "You'll take a drink with me?"

He reflected a moment, and finally replied in a thick voice:

"Don't mind if I do. Gimme some w'isky, Charlie."

And when the waiter had gone, still eying the crook-hunter curiously he muttered:

"Who th' deuce are you, anyway?"

"Oh, I'm a stranger in town, looking about to see the sights, and I kind of thought you'd be a good party to show me around."

"Yes," returned the fellow dryly, regarding Thad suspiciously.

"I presume you are pretty well acquainted in these parts, are you not?" pursued the detective.

"So so," growled the toper, and lapsed into silence.

The drinks soon arrived, and the tramp gulped down his spirits.

CHAPTER VIII.

DROPPED OUT OF SIGHT.

As soon as the vagabond had swallowed the liquor he appeared to revive from his stupor and became quite talkative.

"So ye want to see the sights, do you?" he began.

"That is what I do," replied the detective.

"Well, I'm the boy that can show 'em to ye."

"That is what I supposed. I suppose there are a great many strange things in this big city?"

"Ye kin just bet there is!"

Thad glanced about him as if to make sure that he would not be overheard, and then pretended to grow very confidential.

"I say," he began, in a whisper, "I can trust you, can't I?"

"Trust me?" echoed the fellow with a surprised look.

"Yes. You see I'd like to buy a little green-goods which I think I can dispose of out our way. Maybe you could steer me to some place where I could get it."

The fellow shook his head dubiously.

"Oh, no, you don't want nothing o' that kind," he growled, regarding the detective more suspiciously than ever. "Ye don't look like it. See?"

Thad saw that he had made a mistake, and proceeded to change his tactics.

"Never mind about the green-goods," he laughed. "I see you're too shy in that direction. But wouldn't you like to go into a scheme that there's lots of money in?"

The bloated features assumed an amused expression, and the man appeared to be trying to divine whether he was talking to a genuine greeny or a sharper in disguise.

"I dunno," he chuckled. "Wat's yer scheme?"

"You won't give me away?"

"No, I won't give you away," replied the tramp with a sarcastic grin.

"Have another drink, partner, and then we can talk better."

"I don't mind."

The drinks were ordered and consumed as before, after which the detective resumed:

"I know a fellow who is collecting all kinds of curious relics, and will pay any price for them. Now, of course it costs a lot of money to buy these things, but sometimes people happen to know where such things are left lying around where they can be picked up by a chap that's up to snuff. Catch on?"

The fellow was getting pretty drunk by this time, but he still retained enough of his self-possession to see that the detective was trying to draw him out in some way.

He evidently believed he was too cunning for his well-dressed questioner, for his grin broadened, as he replied:

"Ye take me fer a prig, eh?"

"Nothing of the kind—not exactly," the detective hastened to say. "Still, a fellow has to make a living, you know, and if he happens to know where he can pick up a battered old silver snuff-box that is no good to anybody, but which some rich crank will pay fifty dollars for, where's the harm?"

Thad paused to see what reply the fellow would make, but he sat silently eying him, with the comical grin on his face.

Finally, however, he murmured:

"W'at ever put that idea into yer head?"

That was the question, above all others, which the detective could have desired him to ask.

"I'll tell you," he returned, bending further over the table and dropping his voice to a confidential pitch. "I was coming down Third avenue this afternoon, when I came to a second-hand store where they keep all kinds of old curiosities such as I speak of, and my mind reverted to this collector at once, so I went in. I hadn't looked about long before I found something that I was sure would please this chap, and bought it. What do you think I paid?"

"Dunno."

"Five dollars. I took the article to this man, and what do you imagine he paid me for it?"

"A tenner?"

"Fifty dollars!"

The fellow was interested now.

"Ye don't say!" he exclaimed.

"That's right. And it wasn't the value of the thing itself that induced him to pay such a price, either."

"I know. It was 'cause it was old, I reckon."

"No, that was not the reason, either."

"W'at then?"

"It was all on account of a peculiar mark there was on the article."

The detective watched the fellow's countenance, but there was no change.

He evidently suspected nothing so far.

"A peculiar mark, eh?" echoed the fellow dreamily.

"Yes. But let us have another drink."

"Don't mind if I do."

After the drinks were disposed of, Thad went on:

"I looked about the place for something else with this same mark on, but it wasn't there. Now, if I knew where I could get hold of anything bearing the curious mark I wouldn't mind paying a good sum for it."

The fellow appeared still to remain indifferent, and still wore the sarcastic grin, but finally he asked, more, apparently, for the sake of keeping up the conversation than on account of any interest he took in the question:

"W'at for a sort of a mark is this, anyway?"

Thad pulled the letter found in the murdered man's room out of his pocket and, folding it so that only the fac-simile of the scarlet brand appeared, held it before the tramp's eyes.

The fellow started and became a trifle nervous.

"W'ere the deuce did ye git that?" he demanded.

"Copied it off the articles I bought in old Einstein's curiosity shop."

"Einstein's?" the fellow gasped.

"Yes. Of course you don't know where the place is. It is run by one Michael Dougherty, better known as Mike."

"The deuce I don't know where the place is!" cried the other, becoming greatly excited. "What was the article you got there?"

"The fact is, I got a couple of articles, but I referred to them as one on account of their being companions. Here is one, which the collector allowed me to fetch along for fear I might forget the exact appearance of the mark."

Here he drew out one of the old pistols and held it up before the fellow's gaze.

If the weapon had been a modern one, loaded and presented to the vagabond's head, he could not have started more violently nor lost his color more completely.

"Pretty, isn't it?" asked the man-sleuth.

The tramp shook as with an ague, and for some moments could not speak.

Finally he gasped in little more than a hoarse whisper:

"And old Mike charged you five dollars for that?"

"Yes. Cheap, wasn't it?"

"And the collector chap gave you fifty?"

"That's right. But you don't look well. Have another drink?"

The fellow consented willingly and gulped the liquor eagerly.

As soon as the liquor began to take effect, the fellow's whole aspect and bearing changed.

"Shay," he muttered, almost incoherently, "you trying to play me for a sucker, or are you square?"

"I don't understand you, sir," replied Thad, with affected indignation.

"No harm, shir, no harm. Was I wanner know is, 'ow ye come to come ter me 'bout this thing."

"Shall I tell you?"

The fellow started and looked at the detective in alarm, but made no response.

"I'll tell you why I came to you, sir," he went on in a stern tone of voice. "I came to you because I happen to know that you sold those pistols to old Mike, that you went there this afternoon with something else, and that you know where you can get plenty more!"

The latter part of the speech was largely venture, but it had the desired effect; the fellow was thoroughly alarmed.

He shook violently and could not utter a word.

"Now, I am willing to do the square thing by you, old fellow," pursued Thad.

"If you will either put me on to where you get these things or bring them to me directly so that we can get the full value, instead of letting old Mike swindle us, I'll whack up with you on the proceeds. What do you say?"

The tramp eyed his questioner skeptically.

"Did old Mike tell ye all this?" he finally faltered.

"Not Mike alone. He told me, of course, but I know it through other channels. Suffice it to say that I know it, and you can have your choice of either putting me on to it, or having me put the police on to you!"

"It was the cursed Cuban that give me away, I'll bet a—"

Here he checked himself, and grew very red.

"The Cuban!" mused Thad. "Could he mean Aspinall?"

Here he ventured a bold stroke.

"Never mind what Aspinall told me," he urged. "I know all about it, and will do as I say."

"Aspinall?" echoed the ruffian, bursting out into a maudlin laugh. "Who in blazes is Aspinall?"

Thad saw that he had made a mistake, and made a desperate attempt to recover his lost ground.

"No matter about the Cuban's other name," he muttered dryly. "That is his right name, and I prefer to call him that."

"Bet ye dollar that ain't his right name!"

"I'll go you, but not now. What do you say to my proposition?"

The fellow uttered a low chuckle.

"See ye later 'bout that," he laughed.

"No you won't! You'll either settle the thing here and now, or into the police's hands you go inside of five minutes!"

"Ye will, eh?"

And the fellow jumped to his feet, apparently perfectly sober, and putting his fingers into his mouth, uttered a shrill whistle.

In less than a second the detective was surrounded by a dozen men, all of them as villainous-looking as the tramp with whom he had been in conversation.

They glared at Thad and indicated a desire to devour him blood and bone.

"W'at's the row?" demanded one big fellow, edging to the detective with a dangerous light in his eye.

"A beak," explained the ruffian Thad had been talking to.

"Oh, *that's* the lay, eh?" growled the big man, pushing up his sleeves menacingly.

"W'at's 'e want?" asked another, glaring at the detective.

"He's spyin' about for cracks," explained Thad's tramp.

"Oh, 'e is, is he?" cried the big man, sidling up still closer to Thad and jostling him.

The detective moved back.

"Gentlemen, there is some mistake here. This man and I were talking over a matter of business, and he misunderstood my meaning, that is all."

"No, I didn't misunderstand yer meaning," growled the tramp. "W'en a cove says he's a-going to give me to the peelers, there ain't no chance for a mistake. Do him, pals!"

The words were no more than uttered,

when the big man's powerful fist shot out like a catapult toward Thad's face, but the latter was now on his guard and parried the savage blow.

The next instant his own fist went out like a battering-ram, and the big man went down as if struck by a brick.

That was a signal for a general attack. The crowd all came at him like a pack of hungry wolves, striking rapidly and viciously.

For a time it looked as though the detective would get the worst of it, but by dint of hard, splendid sparring, he managed to ward the deadly blows from his face pretty well.

He had two decided advantages over his adversaries, in spite of their superior numbers.

In the first place, he was an expert boxer, and in the second, he was cool and collected, while they were in a wild state of agitation bordering on panic, and somewhat in liquor.

Hence many of their blows were ill directed, and those that did come his way were for the most part easily parried.

He received several body blows that were beginning to tell upon his powers of endurance, and saw that some kind of stratagem must be practiced or he must soon succumb.

Watching his opportunity, he made a sudden spring backward, and was fortunate enough to clear the circle that surrounded him, and get his back into a corner.

The action had been so sudden and unexpected that the ruffians were taken off guard, and before they could recover from their surprise, the detective had whipped out a couple of revolvers and leveled them upon the mob.

"Stand back!" he warned. "The first man who approaches me dies on the spot."

This sent consternation and terror to the hearts of the besieging party, and one by one they began to slink away.

In five minutes all had dispersed, and the place had become as quiet as a Quaker meeting-house.

Then Thad, still holding his pistols in hand, looked about for his tramp, but was disappointed at not being able to see him.

He made a hasty search of the various small rooms off the large one, but the man was not to be found.

As he returned to the main room again, the big man who had made the first attack, and whom Thad had knocked down, met him with a smile, which was a surprise to the detective.

Putting out his hand, he said:

"Put her thar, pard. You're a fighter from away back, and I admire ye fer it. Have er drink."

Thad shook his hand, but declined the proffered drink.

"Ye're lookin' fer yer man, I reckon," ventured the big man.

"Yes. I wonder what has become of him."

"The measley pup sneaked outen the door the moment he got us into a broil," growled the big fellow.

"Gone?"

"Yep, ten minutes, I reckon."

Thad was on the street in an instant, but he had no more than got outside, when he realized the folly of attempting to find the ruffian that night, and started up the street, intending to walk as far as the Bowery and take the Elevated home.

He was still a good deal excited, and walked rapidly, so that he was not long in reaching the Bowery.

Just as he turned into that street, he was surprised and gratified to espy his man sauntering along at an easy gait.

Fortunately the tramp had not seen Thad and he followed the fellow, keeping in the shadow.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BIRDS CAGED.

THE tramp was still considerably under the influence of liquor, and made little headway, so that the detective was compelled to loiter very slowly in order not to overtake him.

He kept right along the Bowery till he came to Houston street, when he turned off the Bowery and walked as far as Second avenue and turned up that thoroughfare.

The tramp did not go very far along this

street before he stopped before one of the better quality of houses to be found in that part of the town, and after looking about him as if to make sure that he was not being followed or watched, ascended the stoop and rung the bell.

It was now between eight and nine in the evening, and the street had grown quite dark, but from the shadowy nook into which the detective had stopped he had a fairly good view of the tramp as he stood on the stoop, through the friendly aid of a lamp on the next corner.

The man stood for some minutes after ringing the bell and continued to cast his eyes about him, as though fearful lest he was being shadowed.

Finally the door appeared to have opened, for the detective could see that he was engaged in conversation with some one.

This continued for five minutes or more, when whoever he had been conversing with stepped out upon the stoop, and the detective could see that it was a small-sized man.

Another five minutes elapsed, during which the two men appeared to be engaged in an earnest and excited conversation, and finally they descended the stoop together and strolled on up the street.

Thad followed at a safe distance, on the opposite side of the street.

The two men only walked as far as Second street, and there boarded an up-town car.

The detective was in a quandary what to do for the instant. It would not do for him to board the same car, as he knew the tramp would recognize him.

But he was not long in making up his mind what to do.

Remembering that he had put a false gray beard and wig into his pocket for an emergency, he stepped into a dark corner and quickly adjusted them to his face and head, and then ran for the car, which was still scarcely half a block away and had just stopped to take on another passenger.

A sharp run enabled him to overtake the car before very long, and he took up his position on the rear platform.

From his position he could see the tramp inside and also his companion, the sight of whom gave the detective a start.

It was the identical old man whom he had seen in the Elevated a few nights before, and whom he had seen hurrying through the gate for the apparent purpose of catching the train upon which young Summerville had gone to Chicago.

He was astonished beyond description, for the reason that the old man could not have had time to have gone to Chicago and returned, and the detective was puzzled to understand why he had boarded the same train with Summerville.

As he thought the matter over a shudder ran over him.

He thought of what young Summerville had told him about being branded for assassination, and wondered whether his time had not come at last.

Meanwhile the car jogged up-town, and in the course of time reached Forty-second street.

Here the tramp and the old man got off and walked up toward Third avenue.

But they did not stop there, but kept on up to Fifth avenue, and turned up that thoroughfare to Forty-fourth street, and again turned West.

About the middle of the block they stopped and talked excitedly for some moments.

They were in front of the next house to the Berkeley Lyceum, and as there was a performance going on at the theater, Thad walked on past the two men and entered the lobby.

As they had not so much as turned their heads when he passed, he was emboldened to come out soon afterward and mingle with the crowd of people standing about the entrance to the theater.

In this way he succeeded in getting within a few feet of the two men, who, knowing that a promiscuous throng would pay no attention to what any two were discussing, talked freely and in a tone sufficiently loud for him to catch a good part of their conversation.

"Why not to-night as well as any other time?" he heard the tramp ask.

"Oh, I presume it could be done to-night,

but what is the hurry, now that he is out of the way and there is no one else to interfere?" objected the old man.

"Don't be so sure about the latter."

"What do you mean?"

"About there being nobody to interfere."

"Who is there—since Edwin is out of the way?"

"There is a sharper one than he ever was, don't forget that."

"Who is it?"

"That cursed detective."

The old man chuckled derisively.

"A fig for him!" he rejoined.

"Don't be too ready to sneer at him, Mr. Ludlow," admonished the tramp. "He is sharper than you imagine."

Thad was startled at the name.

"Ludlow?" he mused. "Where have I heard that name lately?"

And then it came to him.

John Ludlow was the name of the maker of the curious old pistols he had purchased of old Mike!

But, what could that Ludlow, who had lived in 1762, have to do with this man?

It must be merely a coincidence, he thought, and cast the matter from his mind.

"There is no cause for apprehension in that direction," rejoined the old man. "I was in the car with him the other night when he went up-town with Edwin, and had him frightened out of his wits by a little ventriloquism."

"Nevertheless, he is a brave fellow and a fighter from the word go, as I have had reason to know this very night."

"Nevertheless, he has nothing to go on."

"Hasn't he?"

"No."

"You forget that he has the letter of warning, and in all probability the letter that was sent to Bardwell Summerville."

"That goes for nothing, so long as he does not know the meaning of them."

"In my opinion, he does know something about the meaning, at all events."

"What makes you think so?"

"Two or three reasons."

"Among which are?"

"First, his eagerness to get hold of something marked with the character, and the fabulous prices he is willing to pay; second, his anxiety to discover where the articles marked—"

"What do you mean?" interrupted the old man.

The tramp had evidently said more than he had intended, for he became greatly confused, and appeared unable to proceed any further.

"What do you mean by saying that he was anxious to know where the articles so marked come from?" repeated the old man sternly.

"Why—why—the fact is," stammered the tramp, "he has somehow got hold of some of the things, and—"

"Got hold of some of the things! What do you mean?"

"Well—well," faltered the now thoroughly frightened tramp, "he—he—"

"He what?"

"He has some of the things," the fellow finally made out to say.

"Impossible!"

"But I tell you he has."

"How do you know?"

"I—I saw them."

"You saw them?" cried the old man in so loud a voice as to attract some of the bystanders, who looked around.

"Sh-s-s-sh!" admonished the tramp, looking up apprehensively.

But it was too late.

The crowd imagined they recognized a chance for a fight, and were all alert.

A whispered remark passed between the two disputants, after which they moved away.

The men went toward Fifth avenue again, and Thad followed, keeping them in sight.

When they reached Fifth avenue they turned down-town and went as far as Forty-second street, and then turned east. About the center of the second block they stopped in a saloon.

The detective entered, and not seeing his men, pushed on through and found them in the back room seated in one of a series of small stalls which ran along one side of the room.

Luckily the next stall to them was unoccupied, and Thad entered it and took a seat.

The waiter was in attendance upon the two men, who were ordering drinks, and as a consequence they had not yet commenced talking upon any confidential matter when the detective sat down.

Soon after, however, they received their drinks, and after the waiter had withdrawn, the old man said:

"You say this detective had some article with the mark on it?"

Instead of replying the tramp, asked:

"Who is in the next stall?"

"Nobody but an old gentleman. He appeared to be half shot, and I guess there is no fear of him."

The fellow was silent a moment, as though afraid of being overheard, but at length replied to the old man's question.

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"A pair of pistols," replied the tramp timidly, as though he would rather have not been compelled to answer.

"Not the holsters?" cried the old man in a tone of horror.

"Yes," rejoined the tramp in a quavering voice.

"Where did he get those?"

"How should I know?"

"You should know, sir," retorted the old man hotly. "You, above all others, should know."

"I?" cried the ruffian innocently.

"Look here, sir, if that fellow has those pistols you know how he came by them. Now, sir, how did he get them?"

"I don't know, Mr. Ludlow, I pledge you my word of honor I do not, sir."

"Your word of honor! That is a thing of small value, Martin Summerville. Now tell me, sir, how this fellow got those holsters, or by the Eternal, you shall share the same fate as your uncle and cousin! Do you understand?"

"I understand," whispered the tramp in a scared voice. "But I swear by all that is good and holy, that I do not know how he got them."

"You lie!" roared the old man. "Tell me, I say, or by Heaven, I'll kill you this instant!"

Thad then heard a scuffle, mingled with a gurgling sound as though some one was being choked.

The detective left his stall, and by that time several persons who were in the saloon had gathered around the struggling men, and they were soon separated.

Meanwhile Thad had slipped out to the street and summoned a policeman.

As soon as the officer entered the place Thad pointed out the old man and told him to arrest him.

The belligerents had been separated by this time, and the policeman hesitated.

"What's the trouble?" asked the policeman.

"Nothing at all, officer," interposed the barkeeper. "These gentlemen were having a little dispute, that's all. But everything's settled now and there's no occasion for interference."

Then turning to Thad, he said:

"What d'ye mean by tryin' to make trouble in here? If ye don't like the way things is run here, get out!"

"Officer," repeated Thad, ignoring the blustering barkeeper, "I ask you to arrest that man!"

"Well, I like that!" sneered the policeman.

"What right have you got to ask me to arrest him? This gentleman" (indicating the barkeeper) "assures me that he has done nothing."

"And I'll back it up," snorted the saloon man. "I know both these men, and will vouch for them. If anybody's to be arrested, take this old fellow along. He's been creating a disturbance around here all evening."

"Is that so?" growled the policeman, swaggering up to the detective. "What d'ye mean, sir?"

"Don't get excited," said Thad coolly. "I have just this minute come in, and have created no disturbance whatever. But I want you to arrest that man. If you don't, you are likely to lose that badge before you know it."

The officer laughed derisively, and was joined by the rest of the crowd.

"I like that!" he retorted. "Now, just to show you that you are not as smart as you think you are, old man, I'll not arrest this man, but I'll just run you in for luck."

"Will you?"

"Yes, I will."

With that he put his hand on Thad's shoulder.

"Take your hand off me, sir!" cried Thad, losing his temper.

"Come on!" yelled the policeman, still retaining his hold on the detective's arm.

"Take him along!" shouted the crowd.

Thad had refrained from revealing his identity up to this time for the reason that he knew it would hinder his future operations for the evening, besides he disliked to humor the insolent policeman enough to tell him who he was. But now he saw that such would be necessary in order to avoid getting into trouble.

So he bent forward and whispered something to the policeman.

Instantly there was a change in the state of affairs.

The policeman released the detective, stepped back and regarded him with awe and reverence.

The crowd could not understand it, and still clamored for the arrest of the alleged disturber of the peace.

Instead of gratifying their wish the officer turned to the detective and asked:

"Which one do you wish me to arrest, Mr. Burr?"

At the sound of the name every man turned pale.

The two criminals shook with terror.

"Both of them," replied Thad calmly. "And I do not know but this barkeeper ought to go along with them for attempting to shield criminals."

The policeman looked bewildered.

"I'll have to call assistance," he murmured.

"Very well. Go out and send in a call, and I'll guard the prisoners while you're gone," ordered Thad, drawing a couple of revolvers and leveling them on the two men.

Without more ado, the policeman left the room and went to send in what is known as a "hurry-up call."

CHAPTER X.

SLIPPERY CUSTOMERS.

THAD realized that he was taking big chances in having the men arrested, as he would be compelled to prefer a charge of murder, for, although he was pretty well satisfied in his own mind of the old man's guilt, there might be some difficulty in proving the fact to the satisfaction of a jury.

His only hope was that the two men having quarreled, the tramp would turn state's evidence to get square with the old man.

Meanwhile the policeman had gone to summon assistance and a patrol wagon, and of all that throng the old man appeared the least concerned.

The tramp seemed a little nervous, but even he did not appear to be much put out by the prospect of being arrested.

Finally, after a long wait, the policeman returned, accompanied by three other officers, one of whom was the captain of the precinct.

Thad quickly made himself known to the captain, and confidentially expressed his conviction that the old man was the murderer of the man found dead in the Astor House, and that the tramp was an accomplice.

"But the jury brought in a verdict of suicide in that case," observed the captain.

"I know it did, but neither the superintendent nor myself are satisfied with the verdict. Besides, I have almost positive proof that it was a case of murder, and am sure these two men were connected with it."

"Very well, Mr. Burr," rejoined the captain respectfully. "If you say so, we will lock them up. You will go along and prefer charges, of course?"

"Certainly."

"Had we better put the nippers on them do you think?"

"I would. In my opinion that old chap

is a desperate character, and I think you will find that he is disguised."

"We'll soon find out whether he is or not," replied the captain.

He then proceeded to put the handcuffs on the old man, and followed the action by treating the tramp in the same manner.

Then stepping back to where the detective was standing, the captain observed:

"There is something crooked about those fellows on the surface."

"Why?" asked Thad curiously.

"The very fact of that respectable-looking old man being in company with the tramp."

Thad laughed.

"I guess you will find that he is no more a tramp than the other," he replied.

"Do you think so?"

"In my opinion they are both sailing under false colors."

"What makes you think this fellow is not what he seems—a genuine vagabond?"

"Because, in the first place I find him in a low dive on Clinton street, and his language was that of the typical east-side tough, and afterward when I heard him in conversation with the old man he used as good language as the old man himself, who is evidently an educated man. Besides, his name is Summerville."

"Summerville?" repeated the captain with a puzzled expression.

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Do you recall the name of the man who was found dead in the Astor House?"

"By George! it was Summerville, wasn't it?" exclaimed the captain with distended eyes.

"That's what it was, and that is one thing that led me to believe that this fellow is accessory to the murder, if we succeed in proving that it was murder, which I have no doubt we will."

The men were then bundled out to the patrol wagon and the four officers and the detective mounted the wagon with them.

All this time the old man had not uttered a word or shown any indications that he was the least concerned in the matter.

He had submitted calmly to arrest and had gone along as peaceably as a lamb.

At the detective's suggestion, however, they were closely watched until they arrived at the station where, Thad having made his charges, they were locked up in separate cells.

Having nothing else to do, and not having dined, the crook-chaser returned home.

By the time he had finished his meal it was after eleven o'clock, but as he sat in his private office smoking and reviewing his work for the day, he suddenly recalled the remark he had heard the old man whom he had just locked up make about something that was to be done that night, or rather his asking why it must be done that night.

He chuckled as the thought occurred to him and thought at the same time of the fact that the two would-be perpetrators were at that moment behind the bars.

But with it came another thought.

Might not these fellows have accomplices? And if so, was it not possible that they might attempt to carry out the plot, whatever it might be?

He concluded that such a thing was feasible, and his mind at once reverted to the place on Forty-fourth street as being a possible place of rendezvous, and, fatigued as he was from his hard day, he could not rest content until he had made another trip to the place for the purpose of reconnoitering.

There was a hackman who stood on the corner of Thirty-fourth street and Ninth avenue, whom Thad had employed on numerous occasions for many years, and the detective could always rely upon him, both for secrecy and for getting to a point in the shortest possible space of time.

Luckily McGuire was at his post when Thad came to the corner, and he greeted him cordially, as soon as he discovered who the detective was, for to a casual observer he appeared to be a very dapper young man on his way to call upon his lady love.

"Oi s'pose yez do be wanting to go somewhere to-night, Mr. Burr?" observed the hackman.

"So I do, Pat," rejoined the special.

"But I hope it will not be a case of as much skurrying about as we have sometimes had."

"Ah, as for the matter of that, sor, yez know that Oi'm at yer service for annyphere that me ould horses kin thravel. But Oi'd joodge from the rig of yez that yez was not in for the rough-and-toomble scrapes that we've been in before."

"I hope it will not turn out as badly as some we've been in, Pat. But we can never tell what is going to happen when we detectives start upon a man-hunt."

"Indade, an' ye can't. Phwere shall Oi dhrove yez, sor?"

"Forty-fourth street, near Fifth avenue, Pat," replied Thad as he climbed in.

"All roight, sor. Yez'll be there in a jiffy."

And McGuire cracked his whip, the hack wheeled about, and was soon bowling along over the rough pavement toward Broadway.

As Pat had promised, he was not long in reaching the corner of Fifth avenue and Forty-fourth street, and Thad alighted and told the hackman to drive along up the avenue and call back at the same spot in a half hour, and that if he was not there, to wait till he came.

The hackman promised, and the detective walked toward the west on Forty-fourth street.

The performance at the Berkeley Lyceum was finished, the audience dispersed and the place was in darkness.

Likewise was the house next door, with the exception of a single light on the top floor, which Thad judged was the servants' quarter.

Everything was quiet about the place, and he began to think his expedition had been in vain.

Still, he could not feel content to leave the place entirely, and crossed over the street where he was completely in shadow, and watched the house opposite for some time.

Nothing occurred for a long time, and finally even the light on the top floor was extinguished, leaving the house in total darkness.

But the shadower still kept up his vigil, unable to tear himself away from the spot, where he appeared to be held by some occult spell.

After awhile a light appeared on the second floor, but whether it had just been ignited or a shutter had been opened, revealing the light, he could not determine. Nevertheless the light was there, and a brilliant one it was.

But that was all. The watcher could see no one nor hear any sound.

The street was dark and quiet, not a person having passed since the detective took up the watch.

Finally, however, he heard the footsteps of a pedestrian away down the street, and it was a real relief to know that some living being was stirring in that locality.

The pedestrian came on up, walking leisurely, and passed on the same side of the street on which Thad was standing, but as he was in the deep shadow the man did not see him, and passed on.

He did not continue far, however, for before he reached Fifth avenue he stopped, stood a few moments, and finally retraced his steps.

When once more opposite the house across the way and directly in front of the shadower, he paused and looked across.

It was too dark to make out anything more than an outline of the man, but Thad could see that he was rather short and spare of build.

He stood there for upward of five minutes, and appeared never to have once taken his eyes off the light at the window across the way.

At length he took out his watch, but as it was too dark to see the face, the man struck a match and held it so as to see the time.

As the match flared up it illuminated the fellow's face for an instant, and Thad was astonished at what he saw.

It was Aspinall!

As soon as he had satisfied himself as to the time, apparently, the little man tripped lightly across the street.

Thad's first impulse was to rush out and seize the man and place him under arrest, but upon second thought he remembered, first, that he had no warrant for him, and

second, that he had not enough evidence against him to make such an action feasible.

Moreover, he was pretty well-satisfied that he had the real criminals locked up, and if Aspinall was in any way connected with the crime something would come out in their trial to indicate if not prove it.

Meanwhile the little man had reached the house on the opposite side of the way, ascended the stoop and rung the bell.

In a remarkably short time the door was opened and Aspinall went in.

After the door closed upon him, all was a sealed book to the detective for the space of nearly half an hour.

Meanwhile the light in the second-story window had disappeared, and the house was again in total darkness.

After waiting for fully half an hour, and arriving at the conclusion that Aspinall intended staying in the house all night, Thad was on the point of abandoning the watch, yet could not resist the temptation of remaining just a little longer. It was fortunate that he did, for inside of ten minutes more a carriage drove up and stopped in front of the house.

Some one alighted from the carriage and ran nimbly up the stoop and rung the bell, although it was impossible to discern anything more than that the person was a man.

The door was opened to his summons with a promptness which led the detective to believe the inmates were expecting the newcomer.

He did not enter immediately, however, but stood talking to some one for some minutes, and then went inside and the door was once more closed.

But as the carriage still stood there, Thad knew that the drama, whatever it was to be, was not yet at an end, and waited.

Nearly half an hour more elapsed before anything occurred, and in all that time no light appeared at any part of the house, and the carriage still stood there.

At length the door opened and four persons appeared, carrying some dark object that resembled a body, completely wrapped in black.

The party descended the stoop very quickly, and the object was placed in the carriage.

The four men then entered and the carriage drove off.

It went toward Fifth avenue, and Thad hastened with all his speed to the corner where, luckily, McGuire was still standing.

"Follow and keep that carriage in sight, Pat," ordered the detective, as he entered the hack.

"All roight, sor. If they goes to the divvil, here's afther thim!"

With that he gave the whip.

The mysterious carriage had proceeded up-town on Fifth avenue, and McGuire put after it, but keeping at sufficient distance behind so that he was not likely to attract the attention of the occupants.

The fugitives went at a rapid gait, and Pat was compelled to drive for all he was worth to keep up with them.

This speed was kept up until the retreating carriage had reached Harlem, when it suddenly slackened speed and went at a moderate rate for a long time.

The Harlem bridge was crossed and the village of Kingsbridge come to and passed, and still the fugitives pressed on.

The last of the scattering suburbs were left behind, and the retreating vehicle proceeded along the country road for several miles.

At length they arrived at a lonely spot at the very foot of Hook Mountain.

A deep, tangled forest flanked the road on either side, and the steep, rugged mountain arose a few rods away from the road.

Here the carriage stopped, and lest they might have noticed the hack following them and suspected that they were being watched, Thad had his driver drive on past the waiting vehicle for several hundred yards. In fact, so far that the men could no longer have heard the sound of the wheels.

Then he stopped and, getting out, proceeded back over the road on foot.

When near the carriage, which could hardly be made out in the dense darkness, the detective approached cautiously in order not to be heard.

He thus succeeded in getting very near the party, who he found had alighted and were talking.

About the first words that fell upon his ears were those in the voice of a woman.

"What have I done to deserve this fate?" she wailed in a piteous tone.

"What have you done?" replied a gruff voice. "You have done everything. You have been at the bottom of all the mischief. The vendetta would have been at an end and the family reconciled, only for your devilish plotting!"

"I know I have been a relentless enemy," cried the woman in broken accents, "but surely I have not deserved this. Kill me, if you will, but think—think for an instant, of the terrible fate of being buried alive! It is horrible! horrible!"

The former speaker indulged in a mocking laugh!

Thad was stunned at the discovery he had made, or imagined he had.

Unless he was greatly mistaken, the voice was that of the old man whom he had thought safe under lock and key.

"Terrible as it is, it is no worse than nor as bad as you deserve, miss!" cried the gruff voice.

The woman attempted to reply, but was apparently strangled, for the detective could hear a muffled sound as of some one with head covered with a mantle.

Thad waited to hear no more, but hurried back to the hack.

"Pat!" he called, "can you use a revolver?"

"I can," replied the Irishman, promptly.

"Then hitch your team and come with me, quick!"

CHAPTER XI.

BURIED ALIVE.

McGuire knew the detective too well to ask any unnecessary questions, and taking it for granted that it was all right, climbed down off the box and quickly hitched the horses to a tree at the roadside.

"Now, sor, Oi'm wid yez. Phwat's the fun?"

"I'm afraid it isn't going to be very funny, Pat," returned the detective. "There's the devil to pay back here!"

"Sure, thin, an' it's no meself that'll be l'avin' the ould fella dun me a second toime. Gimme the goon."

Thad handed him a revolver, and accompanied the action with the order:

"Follow me, and fire when I tell you."

"That Oi will, sor, an' use me fists, too, if ye say the word."

The detective retraced his steps at a rapid gait, closely followed by the hackman.

A few minutes' walk brought them back to where the carriage stood; then Thad paused and put his hand back as a warning for his companion to stop and listen.

The party had moved into the woods, but had stopped, and Thad could hear the sound of digging, accompanied by an occasional exchange of remarks.

"Phwat the divvil air they doin' at all?" whispered Pat.

"They're digging a grave, Pat," replied Thad.

"Faix, an' Oi'm thinkin' it's dairk wurrek they do beavin'. Phwy don't they sthroike a loight, the blaggards?"

As though acting upon Pat's suggestion, at almost the very instant that he spoke a light flashed up, and although they were a good way off and the thick underbrush intervened, Thad could see that two of the men were digging while the other two were holding the helpless woman who, he could see, had her head muffled with a shawl, obviously to prevent her from screaming.

The innocent hackman, who knew nothing of what the men were, looked on in mute wonder for some minutes, and finally whispered:

"Phwat do they be doin' anyway, sor?"

"Digging a grave, Pat," replied Thad, also in a whisper.

"Phwat for?"

"To bury the woman you see there between the two men."

"To bury the woman?"

"Yes."

"Sure, she's not dead yet, sor."

"That is just the reason I propose to interfere in the proceedings. If she was dead, there would be no harm in burying her, but they propose to bury her alive."

"Deuce take thim for a lot of murderin' haythens! Sha'n't I give 'em wan for look?"

"Not yet, Pat. First let us take care of their hackman, so that they will not have so good a chance of escaping when we begin on them."

They were only about fifty feet from where the carriage stood, but it was so dark that the driver could not have seen them from where he sat on the box, so Thad crept along in the deep shadow until he was alongside of the carriage, Pat at his heels; then he suddenly arose and presenting his revolver at the driver's head, said in a low, terrible voice:

"Not a word, or you are a dead man!"

It was light enough from the stars overhead to make out the outlines of a person at that place, and Thad could see that the driver was shaking with terror.

"You shall not be hurt, if you do as I tell you," continued the detective. "You are a city hackman, are you not?"

"Yes, sir," faltered the frightened man.

"And you were hired by those fellows to drive out here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you know what they were up to?"

"No, sir."

"Well, you know now, don't you?"

"I—I—have an idea."

"So I supposed. Now, don't you know that you are equally guilty with them for aiding them in the villainous plot?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Well, I tell you you are. I am an officer, and have followed you from where you started on Forty-fourth street, and now I'll tell you what you must do, and if you fail, I will lock you up before morning."

"Yes, sir!"

"I want you to wheel around and drive back to the city as fast as your horses can conveniently travel. If you do that, and call at 300 Mulberry street to-morrow morning, you will receive your reward, which will not be a slight one; but if you fail, I will have you in the Tombs before to-morrow night. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, go."

The driver was about to wheel about, when Thad stopped him.

"Hold on a second," he observed.

With that the detective stepped upon the hub, lighted a match and held it up to the driver's badge.

"That will do," he said, jumping down.

"Now go!"

The carriage wheeled about and was soon rumbling away in the distance at a rapid gait.

The men stopped digging to listen for a moment, but as the sound of the wheels died out, they resumed work.

Meanwhile Thad and his companion crept along through the underbrush until they were within a few yards from the grave-diggers.

"Phwat air yez goin' to do, sor?" asked Pat. "Shoot thim from here?"

"No, that won't do. In the first place we have no right to do that. It would be murder. Besides, there is danger of killing the woman. I shall wait until we get a little nearer and then we will make a rush upon them, take them by surprise and make them surrender."

A few yards closer, and Thad could see by the flickering light they had, that there were four men, but he could only surmise who they were, as they wore masks.

They were by this time within twenty yards of the grave-diggers, and Thad whispered:

"Now let us make a rush upon them. Do not shoot, except in self-defense, but have your revolver in readiness for action in case it should be needed."

Just as he was on the point of moving forward the detective noticed something he had overlooked before.

The woman was no longer in sight!

What could it mean?

Had they already had time to bury her while he was parleying with the hackman? If such was the case, there was no time to

be lost, so giving the word to his companion, they dashed forward.

The next instant they were in the very midst of the men, but seeing the villains were unarmed, Thad did not draw his revolver.

"Surrender!" he shouted.

The men were completely taken by surprise and panic-stricken.

One or two of them grasped clubs which they had concealed about them and stood on the defensive.

"Where is that woman?" he demanded, addressing one of the men, whom he guessed to be Ludlow.

The old man made no response.

"None of your stubbornness!" cried Thad. "You succeeded in giving the police the slip to-night, but you are not dealing with them now. Where is that woman? Answer, or I will put a bullet through you in an instant?"

The old man had affected the same quiet and unconcerned manner he had done when arrested before and strangely enough, it took Thad off his guard, this time.

For the third time he demanded to know what they had done with the woman, and while he had been asking these questions he had not noticed the actions of the others.

The first thing he realized was receiving a heavy blow on the head from some one that caused him to see stars and to stagger.

This was quickly followed by the onset of the three other men, and then he noticed for the first time that the hackman had been knocked insensible and lay sprawling on the ground, but not until he had laid one of the enemy low.

As soon as Thad came to realize the situation he backed off and began to empty his revolver at the belligerents, but he had no more than fired the first shot, when some one put out the light, leaving the scene in total darkness.

The fight did not last long after that.

Finding Thad on the defensive and armed for the occasion, the men took to their heels and were soon lost in the thick forest—the man whom Pat had knocked down among them.

He could hear them making for the road in the direction of their carriage, or rather where it had been, and he bethought him that they might, on finding that their own vehicle was gone, attempt to take his, so he made his way at once to the hack.

But he had no occasion for uneasiness, for the moment they found their carriage gone, they uttered a series of imprecations upon the perfidious driver, and made tracks toward the city.

It was impossible for the detective to follow them, as he must return to the rescue of the woman, if it was not already too late.

So he made his way back to the scene of the grave-digging, where he found McGuire standing in a dazed condition, having just recovered from the shock he had received from the blow of a spade.

Securing a match he relighted the torch which the men had left, and looked about him.

He saw that the soil about was very rocky, and that it must have been next to impossible to dig in it.

As he examined the surroundings, he noticed an immense slab stone, which had evidently recently been put in place.

An idea suggested itself to him.

The grave had been made under this slab.

Turning to Pat he saw that he was somewhat recovered, and he addressed him:

"Pat, we must turn that slab over somehow. Do you think we can do it?"

"Oi think so, sor," replied Pat, confidently.

With that the Irishman looked about and found a pole which had evidently been used as a hand-spike by the men, and the end of this he shoved under the edge of the stone.

"Ah, you know how to manage it, Pat," observed the detective. "Let us see what we can do with it."

With that both men threw their weight on the pole, but it was no use. The stone was heavier than Thad had calculated upon, and would not budge.

McGuire, who had had some experience with such things before he became a hackman, walked around and surveyed the stone from all sides.

At length he said:

"The murtherin' vilyun has fashened it down some way, sor."

"Fastened it down? Nonsense, Pat. How could they fasten it down?"

"Faix, Oi don't know, sor, but it's fashened down, all the same, Oi'm thinkin'."

"It's fastened down with its own weight, that's all, Pat, and we've got to raise it, if it takes a leg."

Nevertheless the Irishman was not satisfied, and continued to look about.

Finally he appeared to have discovered something, for he took the torch and put it down close to the ground at one end of the stone.

"Aha!" he exclaimed at last. "Oi thought Oi was roight."

"What have you found, Pat?" asked Thad in an incredulous tone.

"Look!" cried the driver.

Thad approached the end of the stone and peered down.

Sure enough; there was a bolt with a nut screwed on it.

Further examination showed that a similar bolt was at the opposite end of the stone.

"Well, that beats all I ever saw!" ejaculated the detective. "The villains had evidently intended that their victim should stay there to all eternity."

"But didn't the blaggards think somebody'd kim along an' see the bolts?"

"Oh, they undoubtedly intended covering them up with dirt, if we hadn't frightened them away."

"Wal, as the bolts is there, there must be a wrench about somephweres."

With that Pat took the light and went poking about the premises, and soon found the wrench with which the nuts had been screwed on.

"Now we'll see phwether it's the weight or not," he remarked, as he bent over the nut and applied the wrench.

In a few minutes the nut was removed, and the hackman turned his attention to the nut at the opposite end of the stone.

It was also soon removed. Then Pat adjusted his lever once more and the two men threw their weight upon it.

This time the stone came up without the least trouble, and, taking hold of the edge of the slab with their hands, they soon raised it to a perpendicular position.

Another little effort threw it over on the ground, exposing a pit the size of an ordinary grave.

"Now fetch the light, Pat," ordered Thad, "and let us see what we have here."

McGuire brought the light, and the detective held it down in the pit, which he found to be some twenty feet deep, and appeared to be the entrance to a small cave.

The pit had evidently been enlarged, for the bolts passed through holes in the rocks which had been drilled for the purpose.

"The villains have taken some pains to prepare this place for their victim," observed the detective.

"Sure, an' they have that," replied Pat.

"The next thing is to get down into the place."

"Faix, an' they must have had a way to get the leddy down."

With that Pat took the light and searched the premises, and at length came upon a long rope.

"Here we air, sor," he cried, bringing the rope to the edge of the pit.

"That's the thing! Now tie one end of it to a tree, Pat, and I will go down."

"Howly saints!" protested the Irishman with a shudder, "Oi w'u'dn't loike to go down into that dark hole, sor."

"Why not?"

"For all yez know, yez be goin' into the presence of the dead!"

And the honest fellow crossed himself piously.

"You're safer in the presence of the dead, my good fellow, than in the presence of the living," laughed Thad. "I never knew a dead man to shoot yet."

Meanwhile McGuire had fastened the rope around a tree, and Thad, taking hold of the end, slid down into the pit, twenty feet below the surface of the earth.

CHAPTER XII.

A STORY OF HORRORS.

WHEN Thad reached the bottom of the pit he was surprised at finding nothing.

He groped in one direction, but his hand only came in contact with the rough, cold stone.

He was afraid to step lest he should tread upon the woman, who he knew must be in there somewhere.

Finally he called up to the hackman:

"Fasten the torch to the rope and let it down, Pat," he said.

Pat obeyed, and the torch was lowered into the pit.

As its light flared about over the interior of the place, a strange sight met the detective's gaze.

At the bottom the pit widened so as to form a shelf some distance from the bottom, under which was a recess some four feet high and extending some six feet into the side of the hill.

In the furthestmost recess of this grotto crouched the victim of the villains, cowering and trembling with fear.

As Thad held the torch down so as to light up the interior of the underground chamber, he saw that the woman was young and beautiful.

Her hair, which was black and luxuriant, streamed in disorder over her shoulders, and her eyes, which were also dark, large and fine, glared at him from the dark corner like those of a maniac or wild animal.

A shudder ran over the detective as he viewed the spectacle.

He felt sure that the terrible ordeal through which the poor creature had passed had unsettled her reason and she was already a maniac.

He was puzzled how to act for some moments, and could do nothing but stand in the stooping attitude and stare at the crouching girl, while her black, glaring eyes seemed to burn into his very soul.

Finally he regained his self-possession, and spoke to her.

"Come, my poor lady, you must come out of this horrible place," he began in a soothing voice.

The poor creature shivered.

"No, no," she murmured. "Kill me, kill me! Do not let me be buried alive! Think, oh, think, of the horrors of such a death!"

"Come with me, then, my poor woman," coaxed the kindly detective. "I am your friend. I will take you where you will be out of danger, out of this living tomb."

"You my friend?" she uttered in a bewildered tone. "No, no, you are not my friend. I have no friends now. He was my friend, but he is gone. They murdered him! He that was so good and kind. They murdered him!"

"But I am your friend," pleaded Thad. "See, I have opened your tomb and driven your enemies away. Ludlow and Aspinall and Summerville are all gone and they will be locked up in prison. Come!"

"Summerville? Ludlow?" she repeated dreamily. "Gone?"

"Yes, all gone, and nobody is here but your friends. Come on!"

"All gone?" she repeated.

"Yes, Summerville—Martin Summerville," he said, thinking she might the more readily recognize him by that name, "Ludlow and Aspinall, all gone."

"Aspinall?" she repeated. "Who is Aspinall?"

"Don't you know? The Cuban."

"The Cuban? Oh, I know who you mean; you mean Francisco Gonzales, don't you?"

"Why, certainly. How could I have made such a mistake?" coincided the detective, catching at the hint. "Francisco Gonzales, of course."

"He gone, too?"

"Yes, he is gone, too."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she cried, an expression of surprise lighting up her white face.

But it soon changed, and the old look of despair came back once more.

"No, no!" she cried piteously, "he has not gone. He will never go as long as one of the family remain. He will never go. No, no, no!"

"But I tell you, my good woman, that

he has gone. I drove him away, and he will not dare to return, nor will he dare to molest you so long as you are with me."

She looked at him wistfully but doubtfully.

"Are you sure?" she finally faltered.

"Perfectly sure; but, you must come out of this place, at once, for Gonzales may come back here."

"Yes, yes, I know he will come back here!" she cried with a terrible wail. "I told you he would come back!"

"Then come with me. Leave here at once, and he will not find you when he comes."

"Leave this place?" she said, dreamily. "How can I? They have fastened down the slab with great bolts and I can never leave."

"But I have removed the bolts," persisted Thad. "The slab has been removed, and you are at liberty to go when you like. Come quick, or he may return and fasten it down again! Listen, I think I hear them coming now!"

The woman shuddered.

"Who? Gonzales?" she cried.

"Yes. Quick! Another moment, and he may be upon us! I have a carriage here for you, and we will fly to a place of safety. Come, be quick, quick!"

This had the desired effect.

The poor creature scrambled from the grotto, and was soon at the detective's side, where she stood trembling like a frightened hare.

Without another word the detective fastened the rope about her waist, and then called to the hackman to draw up.

She calmly submitted to being drawn up, and in another minute was above-ground.

McGuire then lowered the rope again, and Thad grasped it and drew himself up.

"Now, Pat, let us get away from here as soon as possible," commanded the detective.

"Go get your team and drive here, and we will meet you at the point in the road where the other carriage stood."

The hackman struck out through the thicket in the direction of his team, while Thad and the woman made their way out to the road at the nearest point.

The sounds of wheels soon warned them that the carriage was coming, and in a few moments more Pat drove up.

The woman was assisted to enter the carriage, Thad followed her, and the carriage rolled away toward the city.

It was some time after daylight when the cab reached Thad's house, and during all that time the woman had not spoken a word.

Thad saw that she was not inclined to talk, and did not urge her, knowing that she wanted nothing so much as perfect quiet.

The detective's wife, a kind-hearted woman, received the young woman and treated her with all the gentleness she would have used for her own daughter, and after the first few days, during which she was timid and constrained, she became cheerful and confiding, and was extremely grateful for what was done for her.

A week had passed, and Thad had made no new discoveries in connection with the mysterious case. The police were unable to account for Ludlow's and the tramp's escape. He had watched the house on Forty-fourth street and the one on Second avenue, and he had haunted the curiosity shop of Mike, but all to no purpose, except that he had picked up another relic bearing the mystic mark.

This was an old-fashioned brooch, such as was worn by ladies a hundred years ago. It was of solid gold and set with an enormous ruby, which was etched and inlaid with black enamel, the figure being a circle with a delicate scroll work surmounted with the ominous characters "SSS" in bold relief.

One evening about this time, the detective returned home earlier than usual, and as soon as supper was over his wife said to him:

"Thad, the young lady, Miss Swinburn, would like to speak to you, as soon as you have the time to spare."

"There will never be a better opportunity than this evening," replied the detective. "I have nothing in particular to do, and I am extremely anxious to have a word with Miss Swinburn."

"Very well. You go into the parlor and I will send her down."

"Not the parlor, my dear," protested Thad. "You know I never do business outside of the work-shop."

"Very well, let it be there, then. You are so very methodical in all your matters," laughed his wife.

"It's a way of mine, you know, my dear."

Thad went into his private office, and a few moments later the young lady entered.

She was dressed in simple black, the same dress she had on when the detective found her, but she had added some little trinkets which Mrs. Burr had lent her, and Thad thought he had never beheld a more beautiful woman.

She appeared to be about twenty-five, and had the glow of youth and health. Her dark eyes which had appeared so wild and fiery on his first view of her, were calm, sedate and wonderfully beautiful.

"You will pardon this intrusion, I hope, Mr. Burr," she began after the first greeting and Thad had invited her to a seat, "but there are several matters which I wish to speak to you about. As you doubtless have noticed, I have been terribly nervous since that dreadful affair."

"Yes, I have noticed it, and I have not been surprised at it. Indeed, as I told my wife, I am surprised that you have borne up as well as you have."

"I hardly know myself. But no one knows what one can go through until put to the test. In the first place, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart, not only for having rescued me from the terrible death that I was about to undergo, but for your kindness to me since."

"I hope you will not speak of it, Miss Swinburn. What I did was in the line of my duty, and I had an object outside of the mere saving of your life in rescuing you."

"Yes?"

The girl looked at him in surprise.

She had never dreamed, even yet, that he was a detective who had followed her persecutors to the scene of their attempted crime, her idea being that he had happened along by accident.

"Yes, my principal motive was to bring your persecutors to justice," rejoined Thad.

"Then, you know my enemies?" she said, wonderingly.

"Slightly—enough to know that they were very bad men, and deserved condign punishment."

"Oh, you do not know them, sir, and can have no conception of the depth of their wickedness."

"Perhaps. But, what were you going to tell me, Miss Swinburn?"

She was silent a long time, and appeared in a quandary where to begin.

Finally she proceeded:

"You are doubtless puzzled to know how I came in the hands of these men and why they wished to persecute me as you saw they were about to do."

"Somewhat," rejoined the detective.

"It is a long story, and you may not care to hear it."

"On the contrary, I am exceedingly anxious to hear it, Miss Swinburn."

The girl drew a deep sigh and became silent again.

"I was born and brought up in a small village near Chester, England," she finally pursued. "My parents were wealthy and indulged me in every luxury."

"While yet a very young girl, little more than a child, in fact, I met a young man who was also very young, at the house of a mutual friend, and there was something about him that attracted me at once, and I must have impressed him favorably also, for we became very warm friends, and afterward, lovers."

"We were all in all to each other, and never missed an opportunity of being together."

"This had gone on for upwards of a year, and still neither of our parents knew anything about the attachment."

"One day we were strolling as usual through a bit of wood which formed a part of my uncle's park (his estate adjoined that of my father,) when, suddenly, a gentleman came riding up, and the moment my companion saw him he turned pale and began to tremble. I did not understand the mean-

ing of it, until the gentleman on the horse spoke.

"Glaring at my companion, he said:

"So, sir, you have seen fit to disobey, have you? Now go, and if ever I see you with her or any of her tribe again, you shall no longer remain my son!"

"Before he had done speaking my companion slunk away, and the gentleman on horseback, giving me a terrible look, wheeled his horse and rode away without speaking."

"I was both mystified and horrified, but I dared not mention the matter to any of my family. I did not see my lover any more for a long time. But finally one day he came to me in the park and, after making sure that we were not observed, told me something that astonished and saddened me. He told me that we were cousins, that our parents belonged to different branches of the same family and that they were on terms of deadly enmity, and that we must never see each other again."

"With that we wept together and pledged our mutual love, and finally he proposed that we should elope and come to America."

"This I agreed to, but before the time came for our departure, I lost courage and in a moment of weakness told my father of the contemplated elopement. As soon as he learned who the party was with whom I was about to go, he was greatly enraged, and told me that he would rather see me in my grave than to know that I had married a Summerville."

"After that I dared not see my betrothed again, and he was so cast down that he took to drink and became a regular scapegrace, and at length his parents cast him off and he came to America."

"Both he and his parents blamed me for his downfall, and the feud between the two families, which had been passive for a long time, broke out with renewed violence."

"A series of mutual persecutions followed one another in rapid succession, and finally, in an open quarrel between my father and the father of my former lover, my father killed him."

"Although it was proven to have been in self-defense, the branch of the family to which the murdered man belonged were never satisfied until they had killed my father."

"My father had been heavily in debt, and after his death nearly all the property went to pay his debts. I was left, with my two brothers (our mother was dead) almost penniless, and I was adopted by my uncle."

"My uncle, who had never been mixed up in the quarrels before that, at once became the victim of their persecutions, just because he had befriended me."

"At length he found it impossible to remain in England any longer in peace, and came to America, where he was free from their persecutions."

"I should have told you that among the cruelties to which he was subjected, one of his sons was murdered—poisoned."

"My uncle lived in peace so long as he remained in this country, but a short time ago he was compelled to visit the old country to attend to some business and I accompanied him. He had not been on English soil twenty-four hours before he began to receive threatening letters, and I was compelled to go in disguise during our stay, and even during the passage I wore a heavy veil and took a separate state-room so that nobody would suspect that I was with him."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SHADOW OF A CLUE.

As the young lady came to a pause in her narrative Thad interpolated:

"So you were the mysterious veiled lady, were you?"

"Yes, sir," replied the girl, smiling faintly. "I presume you would call me that. But how did you know about it, sir?" she asked in great surprise. "Did you see me?"

"Yes, I saw you, on one or two occasions."

"Where?"

"At the Astor House."

"Indeed? Did any one else notice me?"

"I presume others noticed you, but, I never heard any one speak of you except Mr. Summerville's valet and the clerk of the

hotel. The latter told me that you had been stopping at the hotel, but left the same evening that young Mr. Summerville went."

"Yes, I did stop there until uncle's death and I found that Gonzales was watching me, and suspected that he had discovered who I was, then I went to the house of a friend."

"Did this friend live on Forty-fourth street?"

"No, sir, on Park avenue, near Fifty-seventh."

"Mr. Summerville, who was murdered, was your uncle, then?"

"Murdered?" cried the girl with a look of the utmost horror.

"Yes. At least that is what I believe."

"Why, I thought the verdict was suicide."

"So it was, but the evidence I have found since leads me to believe it to have been murder."

"This is awful!" she cried, her eyes filling with tears. "To think that they should have murdered poor uncle, who was so good and kind to every one!"

"But you say yourself that his enemies were watching him, and that you were compelled to disguise yourself. I should not think you would be greatly surprised that they should have murdered him."

"I am not so much surprised as horrified," she said, covering her face with her handkerchief and beginning to sob piteously.

For a long time Thad refrained from breaking in upon her grief, but after a while she grew more calm, and then he resumed:

"You were in your uncle's room the night he died, were you not, Miss Swinburn?"

She started and looked at him in astonishment.

"How did you know that, sir?" she asked eagerly.

"I have a way of learning these facts; but, tell me, were you?"

She looked at him harder than ever, and there was an expression of alarm in her countenance.

"You aren't a detective, are you, Mr. Burr?" she finally faltered, in little more than a whisper, leaning forward and searching his features with her black eyes.

"Why do you ask?"

"You appear to take so much interest in this affair, and to know so much about it."

"Oh, I am curious about such things, that is all. But you have not answered my question. Were you not in your uncle's room the very night, and only a few minutes before his death?"

After a moment's hesitation, during which she kept her eyes on the floor, she looked up quickly and said:

"If it should be proven that my uncle *was* murdered, the fact of my having been in his room so short a time before he was found dead or in a dying condition, would look as though I had committed the crime, would it not, Mr. Burr?"

"It would have a suspicious look, undoubtedly. Still, there would have to be a motive, and you had no motive in killing your uncle, as I take it."

"I have a motive in killing my uncle?" she cried, with a fresh burst of grief, "him, who was my only friend on earth? The idea is horrible!"

"You admit, then, that you were in his room at the time of which I speak?"

"There is no need of denying it, sir, I was," she sobbed.

"I pray you will be calm, Miss Swinburn," implored the detective soothingly. "There is no occasion for alarm. Confide in me, I beg, and if you are innocent, I will stand by you as no friend ever did."

"Oh, sir, I am innocent," she cried piteously. "Why should I kill my poor, kind-hearted uncle?"

"Of course you are innocent, my dear young lady! But, tell me, did your uncle take any medicine while you were in the room—any calomel, for instance?"

"No, sir."

"Was he, to your knowledge, in the habit of taking calomel?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"How long did you remain in the room after your uncle returned, Miss Swinburn?"

"Only a few minutes. He had asked me to accompany him to the theater, but knowing our enemies were watching us, I deemed it unsafe, as it would not have done

for me to have gone with the veil on, and I dared not go out without it."

"You called to see your uncle about something, I take it," interposed the detective, as she came to a pause.

"Yes, sir. Before leaving the steamer he told me that he did not know how long he should be detained in New York, that he had some matters to settle up in the city that might require several days, and again, he might get through that day and we would start for Chicago the following. He said that he would probably know some time during the day and inform me. I called at his room about noon, but the valet informed me that he was out. Thinking that he would certainly be back by ten (I did not know that he had gone to the theater alone) I called at that time, and waited for him."

"Were you aware, or did he tell you that he did not go to the theater alone?"

"He told me that a friend went with him."

"Did he inform you who this friend was?"

"He said that it was a Mr. Aspinall."

"Have you ever met this Mr. Aspinall, Miss Swinburn?"

"I have not."

"Did your uncle never speak to you about him?"

"Yes, he told me while on shipboard that he met a gentleman named Aspinall, and that he was very interesting."

"Did you never see your uncle and Aspinall together on board the ship?"

"Not that I know of, although I might."

"You say that you know Francisco Gonzales?"

"I have met him since coming to New York."

"How did you come to meet him?"

"He called several times at the house of my friends."

"You did not know, then, that Gonzales and Aspinall were one and the same?"

"Horror! No! They are not, are they?"

"Before answering that I shall be compelled to ask you a question, Miss Swinburn."

"Well?"

"What is the name of the small dark man whom I saw among those who abducted you?"

"That is Gonzales, sir."

"And that is Aspinall as well."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes. Now tell me! You say that you never met Gonzales before your return from Europe?"

"I never did, sir."

"Did you ever hear of him?"

"Never."

"I think you told me he was a Cuban?"

"Yes, sir, he is."

"And you know nothing of his past life?"

"Nothing more than what he has told me."

"Did he ever give you to understand that he knew anything about your family?"

"He never hinted that he had."

"And none of your family ever mentioned his name?"

"Never."

"How, then do you account for his being mixed up in the affair the other night?"

"My abduction?"

"Yes."

"I cannot account for it, any more than you can, sir."

"Do you know Ludlow, the old man?"

"I only met him once before the night of the abduction."

"How came you to meet him then?"

"Mr. Gonzales brought him to the house."

"You never heard of him before, either, I suppose?"

"Never."

"There were two other men in the party. Do you know who they are, Miss Swinburn?"

"I do not."

"One of them is a dissipated man, and sometimes goes about in the garb of a tramp. The other is a tall, fine-looking man. The rough fellow's name, I have learned, is Martin Summerville, but the other's name I have been unable to learn."

The girl uttered a piercing scream and sunk to the floor in a swoon.

Thad was perplexed to understand the

cause of her agitation, but did not stop to inquire then, but summoned his wife.

Mrs. Burr applied stimulants and the woman was soon restored to consciousness, but Thad, thinking she was too much overcome to stand any more questioning at that time, insisted upon her being conducted to her room.

The following evening, however, she appeared to have recovered her wonted cheerfulness, and, at the detective's request, called at his private office again.

Thad wisely refrained from any allusion to the affair of the previous evening, and began by saying:

"Miss Swinburn, I deem it my duty to ask you where your friends with whom you were stopping live. This I ask, not that I wish you to return there, unless you so desire, for you are welcome to remain here as long as you please, but have two motives in desiring to know."

"You are very kind, sir," replied the girl cheerfully, "and I have no reason to keep you in the dark regarding the address of my friends, only I would like to ask you to keep my whereabouts a secret for the present. The moment my whereabouts is known my enemies will be after me, and I dare not even think of what the result would be. My friends live at — Park avenue, and their name is Willis. I made their acquaintance while they were visiting Europe some years ago."

"Thank you," said the detective, making a note of the name and address. "Now I will tell you why I wished to know. In the first place, whatever baggage you have with you must be there, and it is likely that you are in need of the clothing there may be with it, and in the second place, it is possible that your friends may know something of these rascals who abducted you."

"So they may," she replied innocently.

"You have no objection to my going there and making the necessary inquiries and getting your baggage, have you?"

"Not in the least, if you can do so without letting them know where I am."

"That will be easily arranged. I can tell them that you have gone home to Chicago and have empowered me to forward your things. For that purpose you can give me an order."

"Yes, I can do that, but they will wonder why I should have left without letting them know that I was going."

"I can give them some excuse for that. But that brings me to the point of asking you how you came to be at the house on Forty-fourth street from which the rascals took you."

"That I can soon explain. I have been troubled with a nervous disease almost from childhood, which attacks me periodically and renders me next thing to insane while it lasts. Mr. Gonzales, who claims to be something of a physician—"

"A physician?" interrupted Thad.

"He claims to be," rejoined the girl innocently.

Thad thought he recognized a connecting link between the fact of Gonzales being a physician and the fact that the murdered man had been poisoned in the way he had, but he kept the fact to himself, and said:

"You were saying that he claimed to be something of a physician. Go on, Miss Swinburn."

"Well, he claimed to know a wonderful doctor who could cure me, and persuaded me to allow him to accompany me to him. I finally consented, and as he suggested that the night would be the best time to go on account of the immense crowds of patients to be found at the doctor's office during the day, we started about eight o'clock in the evening. When I entered the carriage which Mr. Gonzales had procured I was surprised to find Mr. Ludlow there, but Mr. Gonzales explained that he was being treated for some malady and desired to go with us, so I thought no more of the matter."

"The carriage drove away, and finally stopped and we entered a house—it was the house in Forty-fourth street. Then I discovered, when it was too late, that I had been deceived, that it was not the house of a physician at all. Well, they confined me in a room, and there I remained, never seeing a soul except the servant that brought me my meals, until I was taken out and

put in the carriage to be carried to my living tomb, from which you so kindly rescued me."

"And do you know nothing of why they desired to inflict such a terrible punishment upon you?"

"Only inferentially. Not a word was spoken to me until we arrived at the scene of the horrible outrage, when Ludlow told me that they were about to bury me alive. Horrified almost to insanity, I asked him why he desired to do this, and his reply was that it was to punish me for stirring up the feud between my family and that of my cousin and for causing the ruin of my cousin."

The detective now came to the point of asking a question which he felt was necessary, but which he realized was an extremely ticklish one.

"There is another question which I must ask, Miss Swinburn, and I hope you will try to be calm. You remember I spoke to you last night about there being two other men implicated in the outrage. Did you ever see those men before that night?"

"Not that I know of. The first I saw of them was when Ludlow came to take me out of the room and they accompanied him."

"You noticed that one of them was a rough-looking fellow, did you not?"

"Yes, I do remember that one of them had the appearance of a ruffian, but you must know that I was too much agitated to take much notice of anything."

"So you did not notice anything in the fellow's features that recalled any one you had ever seen before?"

"No, sir."

"Do you not know what became of your cousin, the one you were to marry, after he came to this country?"

"No, sir."

"What was his name, Miss Swinburn?"

"Martin Summerville."

"Then, the rough-looking fellow was your cousin?"

"What?" and the girl sprung to her feet.

"His name is Martin Summerville," repeated Thad.

The woman swooned.

CHAPTER XIV.

NEW REVELATIONS.

MISS SWINBURN was soon restored to consciousness through the skillful efforts and motherly sympathy of Mrs. Burr, and as soon as she regained her calmness somewhat she bravely insisted upon going on with the interview.

"It was only a little weakness," she insisted, with a smile. "I am given to such spells at times. I am well and strong again. You may proceed with your interrogations, only please don't refer to—"

She paused and her eyes filled with tears.

Thad saw her distress, and hastened to remark:

"It is not necessary to allude to the party in question any more, Miss Swinburn. What I want to ask you now is in regard to some other matters."

"Go on, sir," replied the girl, with a desperate attempt at firmness. "Ask what you like; you will see no indications of weakness in me again."

"I was going to ask you with regard to your uncle's valet. How do you account for the fact that he did not recognize you? Of course I know that he was never permitted to see your face. But knowing, as he must have done, that you were with your uncle, is it not strange that he did not recognize your voice? Or perhaps he did not tell me the truth, when he claimed to have not known you?"

"Yes, sir, I guess he told you the truth," rejoined the girl. "He knew nothing about my being with my uncle, and so far as I know, knew nothing of my existence. You see, uncle engaged him a few days before he left England, and as he desired to keep my presence a secret, he never spoke to his valet about me."

"That is feasible. Now, there is another matter. Of course, under the circumstances, oppressed with the fear that your enemies were watching for you, and not knowing what the consequences would be if they found you, I can understand why you never

came near while your uncle lay a corpse in the hotel; but when your cousin came on from Chicago, how is it that you did not meet him and place yourself under his protection?"

"It was my intention to do that, but the moment he arrived he was taken in hand by this man Gonzales, or, as you called him, Aspinall, and I dared not approach or make myself known to him. I saw them enter the room next to that of my uncle the evening of my cousin's arrival, and there was another gentleman with them—"

"Did you recognize the other gentleman?" interrupted the detective smiling.

"I did not, sir. He was a stranger to me."

"Do I look anything like him?"

"Now that I think of it, I believe you do! But it was not yourself, was it, Mr. Burr?"

"So it was. But you were saying that you saw them enter the room together."

"Yes, I saw them enter the room, and I watched till I saw Gonzales come out a few minutes later, but, as my cousin did not accompany him, I concluded that he was going to remain in the room, and determined to see him at all hazards. I approached the door, but before I had time to knock, the door opened and he appeared. But the instant he saw me he closed the door. I could not understand the meaning of it, and was so agitated that I fled to my own room, and a short time afterward, it appears, my cousin left the hotel."

"You also left the same evening, I believe, Miss Swinburn?"

"Yes, sir. I had already made arrangements to go to my friends, and had sent my baggage that afternoon; so, as soon as I found that my cousin was gone I left my key at the office and left the hotel. I desired to tell him that I would stop over a day longer and then come on in time for my uncle's funeral."

Up to this time she had answered every question with promptness and had cleared up every mystery so satisfactorily that the detective could but believe every word she had said.

Moreover, her statements for the most part were corroborated by his own observations.

But here was a point upon which he felt sure she must fail.

"That was two weeks ago, Miss Swinburn," he began. "The funeral of your uncle must have taken place some time ago. How do you explain that you have remained in the city all this time, instead of going on home and attending the funeral?"

"Why, the very day that I reached the house of my friends, owing to the excitement and terrible strain upon my mind, or something, I was prostrated with one of my nervous spells, and for nearly a week did not leave my room. I was just recovering when Gonzales proposed to take me to the great doctor he had recommended."

"You have heard from home since, of course?"

"Only once. My family, not knowing my address, wrote me at the Astor House. That was the day after I was taken ill. There may be more letters at the hotel for me, but you see it has been impossible for me to go for them."

Thad was on the point of mentioning something about what he had heard Ludlow intimate, that young Summerville had been put out of the way, but he concluded that it was as well not to do so for the present, so said instead:

"I will call at the hotel and ascertain whether there are any letters for you or not, Miss Swinburn."

"You are very kind, sir. I do not know how I shall repay you for all your kindness to me."

"Do not mention it, Miss Swinburn. If I succeed in clearing up this dreadful mystery and running down the murderer of your uncle, I shall be amply compensated for what little I have done for you."

"But you have done so much!"

"A mere trifle, and if you will aid me all you can in this work, I shall consider myself more than repaid for it."

"I shall do all in my power, sir. By the way, have my answers been generally satisfactory?"

"Perfectly so."

"Would you—could you, after hearing

them, harbor any suspicion that I was in any way implicated in the murder of my uncle?"

This question was such a surprise to the detective that he hardly knew how to answer it.

It was not a question that would have been natural for an innocent woman, he did not think, and yet her very innocence might have prompted just such a question.

However, he decided to let it pass, and to study the woman more thoroughly before passing judgment. Meanwhile he replied to her question in his usual kindly voice:

"No, I should not think you were guilty, Miss Swinburn. I cannot believe you artful enough to have deceived me so far, and I hope that my judgment has not been at fault. I shall call at your friend's house in the morning and have your baggage sent over, as I think you had better remain here until I have succeeded in running your persecutors to earth."

"I thank you, sir," said the young lady, as she arose to leave the room. "You shall be well rewarded for all your kindness some day. Good-night, Mr. Burr."

"Good-night, Miss Swinburn."

As soon as the young woman left the room Thad disguised himself as an old gentleman, and walking down to the corner of the street, was lucky enough to find his hackman there and told him to drive to the same place he had gone on the evening of the remarkable adventure when they had rescued Miss Swinburn from the living tomb—the corner of Fifth avenue and Forty-fourth street.

"D'yez think we'll have another such toime as we had t'other noight, sor?" ventured Pat tentatively.

"I hope not, Pat," replied the detective, laughing. "Still, you know we can never tell what will happen when you and I go out together, old fellow. You don't mind a little excitement, do you?"

"No, sor, Oi don't moind a little excoitement, but begorra, Oi'm not thurstin' to have me head broke wid a sphade loike Oi was t'other noight, bad 'cess to the blaggards!"

"I don't fancy that myself, Pat," laughed Thad. "But I guess we will not be treated to anything of that sort on this occasion."

When the hack reached the point to which Thad had ordered McGuire to drive, the detective alighted and walked along Forty-fourth street as far as the house from which he had seen the young lady abducted the previous evening.

He kept on the opposite side of the street as before, and stopped in the deep shadow of the livery stable opposite the house.

It was but a little past ten o'clock, and yet the house was dark, and no signs of life were to be seen.

The detective watched for a long time, and finally concluded to cross over and see what he could discover.

He had no more than reached the sidewalk when a figure came up out of the area-way.

As soon as the person emerged into the gray light of the street Thad saw that he was a negro, and supposing him to be a servant in the house, approached him.

"Do you live in this house, my good man?" he asked.

"Yes, sah," replied the negro.

"A domestic, I presume?"

"No, sah; I'm de butlah," he retorted scornfully.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" apologized the detective. "It is impossible to always be correct in the dark, you know. Who lives in this house?"

The negro regarded him suspiciously for a moment, and then replied:

"Doan' you know, sah?"

"If I had, I shouldn't have asked you."

"Den, if you doan' know, you doan' have no business at dat house!" retorted the fellow impudently.

"See here, nigger!" cried Thad, indignant, at the fellow's insolence, "do you want to spend the night in the station house?"

"Sah?" and the darky's eyes opened to their fullest limits.

"Well, there is where you will go in short order if you do not answer my question civilly."

The negro stared at the detective with a scared face for a full minute and finally faltered:

"Am you a officer, sah?"
 "I am," was Thad's stern response.
 "Wal, sah, Doctah Restelle live dah."
 "Is the doctor at home?"
 "No, sah, he's been gone 'bout a week."
 "You are quite sure of that?"
 "Yes, sah."
 "About a week?" mused the detective.
 "It has been about that long since the abduction of the girl. I wonder if he is keeping in hiding on account of that little episode?"

Then slipping a bill into the butler's hand, Thad continued:

"I wonder if it would be possible for you to find out for me where the doctor has gone, when he will be back, or where I could find him, in the event of my having important business with him."

The negro fumbled the bill and looked at the detective with a dazed sort of expression, and seemed undecided what to do or say.

"Remember," pursued Thad, "if you know enough to find him and keep your mouth shut, it will pay you handsomely. But, first tell me, if the doctor is a tall, fine-looking man?"

"Yes, sah."

"I thought so. Let me see—you had a young lady here in the house about a week ago, didn't you?"

"I dunno, sah," muttered the negro, getting frightened.

"But as you are the butler, you must know. Tell me the truth, now, and it will be worth something to you, whereas if you tell me a falsehood it is likely to go hard with you. Had you or had you not a young lady in the house a week ago?"

"We've had so many, sah—"

"But the one I have reference to was a very pretty one—black hair and eyes, and you kept her confined in a room during the whole time she was in the house."

The negro began to tremble violently.

"Fore de Lohd, sah—"

"Tell me the truth, or I shall take you to the police station, and you will be compelled to answer these questions in court!" admonished the detective.

"Ye—yes, sah," stammered the negro, "we did have er young pusson 'bout er week ago. But, say, mistah, if de boss finds out dat I dun tole ye, he'll kill me, suah!"

"You need have no worry about that, my good man," interposed Thad reassuringly. "He will never find it out. What became of the young lady?"

"Deed an' deed, I doan' know, sah."

"You are very sure of this? Remember if you tell me an untruth I will find it out, and it will go hard with you."

"Deed, sah, I hope I may die if I knows. I dun took her her suppah one night, an' de nex' mo'nin' she was dun gone, an' I s'posed she was took to a 'sylum, like mos' o' de young women what's brought here to de doctah."

"The doctor is in the habit of treating insane patients, then, is he?"

"On, yes, sah. Or rudder, he used to. De house used to be full mos' all de time."

"But not lately, eh?"

"No, sah."

"What is the cause of that?"

"I dunno, sah."

"Well, to return to what we were talking about awhile ago: Do you think you could find the doctor for me, in case you were very well paid for it?"

"D'ye t'ink he would find out dat I tole ye?"

"Certainly he would not."

"I s'pose I could fin' him," said the negro, after some hesitation.

"When; to-night?"

"No, sah, not to-night. To-morrow night, mebbe."

"There must be no maybe about it. Can you?"

"I guess so, sah."

"Very well. Where shall I meet you?"

The negro thought a moment, and then said:

"I'll be at de foot o' de Elevated Station at Forty-second street an' Sixt' avenue, 'bout 'leven."

"Which side?"

"Up-town side, corner Bryant Park."

"All right. Now, don't fail me."

"No, sah."

"Because if you do, there will be trouble for you. But if you act your part all right you shall be well rewarded."

"I won't fail you, sah."

The negro was about to move away, when the detective called him back.

"One thing more, Sam," he said.

"My name's Ned, sah," corrected the negro.

"Ned, then. You have seen three men at the house—one by the name of Ludlow, one by the name of Gonzales and one named Summerville, have you not?"

"Yes, sah. Dey was all at de house de day befoah de young lady went away."

"Where are they to be found?"

"You'll find dem wif de doctah, mebbe."

"All right, Ned."

CHAPTER XV.

IN A HORNETS' NEST.

THAD's first business the following day was to call at the Astor House and inquire for whatever mail matter there might be for Miss Hortense Swinburn.

There were three letters, one post-marked England, one New York and one Chicago. The latter was inclosed in a mourning envelope, and was the cause of a good deal of perplexity to the detective, for he did not know whether it was a token of the death of the gentleman who had been found at the Astor House or indicated the death of the young man, whose death old Ludlow had hinted at.

Such was his anxiety on this score, that he was unable to transact any other business until he had returned home with the letters.

The moment the envelope was handed to Miss Swinburn she burst into tears.

But when she subsequently opened the letter Thad discovered that she had fresh cause for grief.

The young lady had opened the letter in his presence, and as soon as she glanced it over she handed it to him.

The letter was brief, merely chronicling the fact that the remains of Mr. Summerville had reached Chicago and had subsequently been interred, and an expression of surprise that Hortense had not come on to attend the funeral. And then, in brief but sorrowful language, related the fact that her cousin Edwin, who accompanied the remains, had returned home very ill, and had soon after died.

"We are unable to decide," concluded the epistle, "whether Edwin's death is attributed to the same cause—SSS—or not, but most of us believe it is. Oh, God! when and where will this dreadful thing end?"

"So your cousin is also dead, Miss Swinburn?" observed Thad, as soon as the young woman was sufficiently calm to be addressed.

"I am not surprised at it."

To his utter astonishment, she replied:

"Neither am I."

"You had an intimation of it before, then?"

"Yes."

"From whom?"

"I do not know."

"Some one must have told you?"

"No one told me, Mr. Burr. But I knew that he was branded for assassination."

"Oh I knew as much," returned the detective, disappointed. "That was when he was a child."

"Yes."

"I did not know but you might have heard a fresh threat recently."

"No, sir."

"I was better posted than you, then."

"How was that, sir?" she asked, looking up quickly.

"I heard old Ludlow tell Martin Summerville that Edwin had been put out of the way; and besides, I knew that Ludlow took the same train when Edwin went to Chicago."

"Indeed? Then he must have killed him."

"Undoubtedly. But the mystery is, how did he manage it. This letter says that he returned home sick and soon after died. That would seem to indicate that some sort of a slow poison had been administered to him. The question is, how did this fellow

manage to do it without Edwin's knowledge?"

"That is a great mystery," rejoined the young lady. "But it is exactly the way all of our folks have died. They take suddenly ill and soon after die, and no one is ever able to find any trace of the bottle or vial which contained the poison. In my opinion, it is some sort of slow poison that takes hours to do its deadly work. In other words, it lies dormant in the stomach for hours, and then suddenly takes effect."

"I believe myself that it is something of that kind, and that may explain how your uncle came to his death. The poison may have been administered while in the company of Gonzales."

"Perhaps," she replied, sadly.

"But, tell me, Miss Swinburn, what is the meaning of that mystic sign?"

The young lady shuddered.

"I do not know," she answered. "I have always been taught to fear and dread it, but never understood what it meant."

"Do you know who makes use of it?"

"Our enemies."

"Another branch of your family, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you never heard whether it was their crest, or whether it was a sign of warning of some sort?"

"I have always been taught to understand that it was a sign of warning—a threat."

"How, then, do you account for its use on jewelry and articles of vertu?"

"I was not aware that it was so used."

"It is, nevertheless."

"Have you seen it?"

"Yes."

Thad opened a drawer and took out a case from which he took the brooch he had bought of old Mike.

"Here is an instance of it," he said, handing her the brooch.

The girl took the trinket and scanned it curiously.

Thad watched her face with great interest, but there was no indication of surprise or horror, nothing but curiosity.

"Where have I seen that before?" she finally mused, looking up at the detective.

"You have seen it before, then?"

"I am sure I have," she replied, still in a tone of reflection. "But for the life of me I cannot tell where or when. It seems like a dream that I had some time during my childhood, and it is associated in some mysterious way with a very old person—an old lady, for I seem to see a crooning form, a wrinkled face and gray hair. But the face is not kindly. It is the face of a wicked, malignant person."

"But you cannot place it?"

"No, sir."

"Your cousin Edwin told me that before any one of your family was to be assassinated that mark appeared on some part of his person, usually the temple. You have been a victim of their malice, Miss Swinburn, have you noticed anything of this kind?"

She shuddered and turned pale, and finally brushed the hair back from her temple.

As Thad looked he saw a small red spot identically like that which had been seen on the temple of the murdered man!

"How came that there, Miss Swinburn?" he asked curiously.

"I do not know."

"You do not know?"

"No, sir."

"Have you no idea who put it there or when it was done?"

"Not the slightest."

As she appeared to be somewhat embarrassed, the detective was inclined to the belief that she was concealing the truth from him, so he was more persistent than usual.

"Remember, frankness on your part may lead to the discovery and punishment of your enemies, Miss Swinburn," he urged.

"I know it, sir," she replied quickly, "and if I knew anything about this affair, I would not hesitate an instant about telling you, but truly and candidly I know nothing."

"When did you first notice it?"

"A day or two after my arrival in England. My uncle called my attention to it. It was that which caused me to assume the disguise in which you first saw me, and it also served as a warning to my uncle that his enemies were after him."

"Your uncle was similarly marked."
 "Yes, sir; I know it."
 "When was that done?"
 "About the same time, I should think."
 "And he knew nothing of how, when or where it was put on him?"

"No, sir."
 "It must have been done while both of you were asleep."

"That is what we all think."
 "So some of your own family must be against you. Don't you think so?"

"Possibly. Such is the peculiarity of this strange and dreadful vendetta that one never knows who is a friend or an enemy. That is the most dreadful thing about it. We live in constant dread, so much so, that when one of our family meets with death at the hands of the unseen enemy, the rest of us are more oppressed with fear than grief, and we have often been charged with heartlessness for that reason."

"It is a dreadful state of affairs," mused the detective with a sigh. "One might as well live in a hornets' nest."

"It is exactly like that. You do not know at what moment you will be stung."

"Well, I must leave you," said the detective, rising suddenly. "I want to call upon your friends."

"Yes, do," responded the young woman, following him to the door. "But not a word of my whereabouts, remember."

"I understand."

It was about the middle of the afternoon when Thad called at the Willis residence, on Park avenue. He wore no disguise, but had taken some pains about his toilet, so that he was presentable in any drawing-room in the city.

His ring was answered by a liveried lackey, and when his simple card, which did not indicate what his calling was, was sent up he was shown into the parlor.

He had asked for Mrs. Willis, and that lady soon joined him in the parlor.

"To what am I indebted for this visit, Mr. Burr?" asked the lady, studying the card, which she still held in her hand.

"I have called on a peculiar errand, Mrs. Willis," rejoined Thad. "You are acquainted with Miss Hortense Swinburn, I believe?"

The lady started.

"Why, yes," she answered, with a look of apprehension. "Have you heard from her?"

"Yes."

"Where is she, pray?"

"At home—in Chicago. She has been very ill."

"Oh, that may account for her not writing us," interposed the lady with an expression of relief. "But I cannot understand how she came to leave us so unceremoniously."

"You do not know how she came to go, then?"

"I do not."

Thad saw that she was offended at the young lady's conduct, and he hastened to reveal what he had not intended to do.

"It is needless for me to ask you, then, if you do not know that Miss Swinburn was abducted from your house, Mrs. Willis?" said Thad in a calm, even tone.

"Abducted? Horrors!" cried the lady, turning very pale. "You cannot mean it?"

"But I do mean exactly what I say."

"By whom?"

Thad reflected a moment, and was not quite certain as to how he should answer the question.

Finally he asked:

"Are you acquainted with a gentleman by the name of Gonzales, and another by the name of Ludlow, Mrs. Willis?"

"I am," was the faint response.

"How long have you known them, may I ask?"

The lady darted an impatient glance at the detective and seemed on the point of returning an evasive answer, but she appeared finally to alter her mind, and said:

"Not very long, I admit, sir. Nevertheless, I know them to be gentlemen."

"I am afraid, Mrs. Willis, that if you knew as much about them as I do, you would have a less exalted opinion of them, for they it was who abducted Miss Swinburn."

"Impossible!" cried the lady in horror.

"Not only did they abduct her, but had it not been for a fortunate and opportune interference on the part of another person, she would now be in her grave."

"Do you mean, sir, that they attempted her life?"

"Yes, and in the most horrible manner imaginable."

The lady's coldness had all vanished now, and she was full of sympathy.

"What can you mean, sir?" she demanded, drawing closer to the detective and speaking with the greatest earnestness.

"I mean that they buried her alive!"

"Heavens! And some one rescued her?"

"Yes."

"How did it happen? Was the party watching them?"

"Yes. He followed them from the house where they had had her confined to a lonely spot some thirty miles from the city, near the Hook Mountain."

"This is terrible. But are you certain that it is true?"

"I am, most certain."

"How, may I ask, do you know?"

"I saw it with my own eyes!"

"Then it was you that followed them?"

"Yes."

She was silent a moment and regarded Thad curiously.

"Are you a detective, Mr. Burr?" she finally asked.

"There is no need of denying the fact, Mrs. Willis," replied Thad with a smile. "I am."

"Then you have come here to ascertain, if possible, where these gentlemen are at present, I presume?"

"Not so much that as some other matters. Do you know whether this man Gonzales claims to be a physician or not?"

"I know that he is a physician, and a very good one."

"You possibly know, in that case, that he persuaded Miss Swinburn to accompany him to the house of a noted physician for the purpose of consulting him regarding a nervous disease with which she is afflicted, are you not?"

"She spoke to me about it, yes."

"Well, it was under this pretense that he induced her to leave the house in their company, and when she got into the carriage she was surprised to find Ludlow there. They took her to the house of a physician named Restelle, who lives on Forty-fourth street, but instead of consulting him with regard to her complaint, they locked her in a room from which she was not permitted to emerge until they took her out to carry her away and bury her alive."

"You astonish and horrify me, sir!" she cried, and her countenance proved the truth of her words.

"Have you seen these men lately, Mrs. Willis?" asked Thad, following up the interview rapidly.

"Not since the night that Hortense went away with—"

She checked herself suddenly, but she had said enough.

She became confused and grew extremely red in the face.

"Then it was with your knowledge and consent that she went with Gonzales?" interposed Thad quickly.

"I knew that she had gone with him, but—"

"And you were not surprised that she did not return?" he interrupted.

CHAPTER XVI.

A PRETTY COTERIE.

To one with less experience of human nature the lady's confusion would have gone a long way toward condemning her as having some connection with the abduction, but, to Thad, it was clearly only the result of his rather sharp cross-questioning.

However, it took her some moments to recover from her embarrassment to answer his last question.

"So I was surprised that she did not return," she replied at last. "Indeed, I was so much worried over the matter that I wrote to Chicago to ascertain whether she had returned home or not, and have just received a telegram saying that she had not. That is what caused me so much surprise when you said she was in Chicago."

Thad experienced a chill. How should he get out of his dilemma?

"The telegram was sent yesterday," pur-

sued the lady, picking it up and referring to the date. "When could she have arrived in Chicago?"

The detective saw his way out now. He had feared that the telegram had been sent that very day, which would have rendered it impracticable for him to have still maintained that she had arrived at home.

"Ah, I see how it was," he said lightly. "She must have reached home a few hours, or possibly minutes, after your telegram was sent, Mrs. Willis."

"It is strange, then, that they did not answer my telegram telling them that she was not here."

Thad saw that he was only getting deeper and deeper in the mire, and concluded that his best plan was to get away from the subject as soon as possible.

"I cannot answer for that," he responded. "Perhaps they will answer later. You heard that young Mr. Summerville was dead, I presume, Mrs. Willis?"

"Yes, they wrote me about it," she replied.

"What do you think of all these sudden deaths in the family?"

"I believe Miss Swinburn's uncle did also die suddenly, did he not?"

"Yes, and very mysteriously."

"Suicide I think they said," she rejoined indifferently.

"That is what they said, but it was nothing of the kind."

"No?"

"It was murder."

"Horrible!" she cried with a terrified face.

"And it is more than likely that Edwin died in the same way."

"Is it possible?"

"It is not only possible, but probable. By the way, were you very well acquainted with old Mr. Summerville?"

"I never met him. When we were in England I met Miss Swinburn and Mr. Edwin Summerville at the house of a mutual friend. It was the latter who introduced Mr. Gonzales to me."

"And he, in turn, introduced his friend Ludlow, I presume?"

She looked surprised that he should have guessed so accurately, but merely replied:

"Yes."

"I think I see through the whole plot," observed the detective, reflectively.

"What plot, sir?"

"The abduction and the whole matter."

"I do not understand, you, sir."

"Well, know, then, that it is more than likely that Gonzales and Ludlow murdered both the Summervilles, father and son. They also abducted Miss Swinburn, but in order to do that it was necessary to make some preparations. So, when young Summerville came on for the remains of his murdered father, Gonzales made it a point to get acquainted with him, and having done so, persuaded him to introduce him to you, knowing that you were a friend of Miss Swinburn and that she would in all likelihood call upon you before leaving the city. Fortunately for their infamous plot, the young lady was taken ill almost as soon as she came to your house. This gave the villainous doctor an opportunity to work out his infamous scheme. He spoke to her, and probably to yourself, of this so called famous doctor, and finally persuaded her to accompany him to the alleged miracle-worker. Having once got her into the hack their task was easy. Taking her to the house of the doctor on Forty-fourth street, whom they probably hired to assist them in their dirty work, she was kept there till such time as they were ready to carry out the rest of the horrible plot of burying her alive."

"This is horrible, sir, if true," sighed the lady.

"And it is true in every particular."

"I fear it is, but what could be their motive for doing such a thing, and also for murdering the two Summervilles, father and son?"

"Are you not aware that there exists a vendetta in the family, Mrs. Willis?"

"No, sir, I never heard of such a thing."

"Well, there is."

"But what connection have Gonzales and Ludlow with it?"

"That I do not know."

"They are in no way related to the family, are they?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Then why should they interest themselves in the vendetta to such an extent?"

"That I cannot answer. I hope that it may some day be explained. My present opinion is that they are merely the hired assassins of the family, or that portion of it that is doing the murdering, for it all appears to be on one side at present."

"And I have been harboring such characters unawares! Heavens! What will the world come to next?"

"It was no fault of yours, madam. But tell me, do you know where these men belong?"

"I do not. Mr. Edwin Summerville told me that Mr. Gonzales was stopping at the Astor House, but I never heard where Mr. Ludlow lived."

"And you say that you have never seen or heard of them since the night that Miss Swinburn went away with Gonzales?"

"I have not."

"Very well, Mrs. Willis," said Thad, rising. "I thank you for the information you have so kindly given me, and shall take up no more of your time. There is one thing more I would like to ask of you, and then I shall leave you."

"What is that?"

"Miss Swinburn asked me to have her baggage, whatever she had here, sent on to her, and if you will kindly let the Expressman have it when I send him for it, I will take pleasure in sending it on to her."

The lady's answer was a surprise to him.

"You will be spared all that trouble, Mr. Burr," she replied, "as I have already sent the things to her home in Chicago."

"Oh, very well," he said. "Good-afternoon, Mrs. Willis."

At precisely eleven o'clock that night Thad was at the corner of Forty-second street and Sixth avenue, and although he was ten minutes ahead of time, the negro was already there, waiting for him.

But the fellow did not recognize the detective.

And with good reason.

He was blacked and made up as a negro.

"Hello, Ned!" cried Thad, when he was near the butler.

The negro eyed him suspiciously, and growled:

"Go 'long, nigger! I never dun made yo' 'quaintance."

"You are mistaken, Ned, old boy," replied Thad. "Think a moment, and I guess you will find that you know me well."

"Whah'd evah I see yo'?"

"On Forty-fourth street, last night. I am the detective with whom you made the engagement to call on Dr. Restelle. Do you remember me now?"

The negro stared at him harder than ever.

"Yo' ain't no 'tective," he finally growled.

"Yo's er niggah, an' 'bout as black er one as I ever seen."

Thad pushed up his sleeve and showed him his white arm.

"Does that look like it?" he asked. "And if I was not the detective, how do you imagine I knew about the engagement for to-night?"

The butler was convinced, but he could not refrain from asking:

"Whaffor yo' done fix up like dat, sah?"

"I had an object in it. It may not be desirable to have those fellows know me when they see me. Which way?"

"Down-town," replied the negro.

"We had better take the Elevated, then, hadn't we?"

"Yes, de Secon' avenoo."

An idea suggested itself to Thad.

"Where is the place? on Second avenue?" he asked.

"Yes, sah."

"Near Second street?"

"Yes, sah."

"I know the place," observed the detective.

"Yo' know de place?"

"Yes. It is on the west side of the avenue."

"Whaffor yo' dun want me to go wid yo' den?"

"I did not know that that was the place until you mentioned Second avenue. However, it will be better to have you along, as

it may be some trouble getting into the house without you."

"How kin I help yo' git in?"

"I don't know yet, but you may be able to help me. For instance, you might know some of the servants in the house, especially if any of them are of your own color, and you might introduce me to them as a friend of yours. When I once get into the house your part of the work will have been accomplished."

The butler reflected a moment, and then responded:

"Yes, sah, I guess we kin fix dat."

"Very well, let us be off."

Thad and his colored companion walked across to the Third Avenue Elevated Road, as that would bring them within a block of where they desired to go, and took a downtown train.

Twenty minutes later they were at the very house Thad had seen the tramp stop at on the night of the abduction.

The negro entered the area-way, and was followed by the detective, and the butler rung the area bell.

Pretty soon a man as black as himself opened the door and the new-comers entered.

"Mr. Johnson, dis am my friend, Mr. Snow," said the butler, when they were inside.

"Glad to make yo' 'quaintance," Mr. Snow, returned the attendant, bowing low and afterward taking Thad's hand.

"Pow'ful glad to know yo', Mr. Johnson," responded the detective in good dialect. "Mighty wahm evenin', sah."

"Yes, sah; pow'ful wahm. Walk in, sah."

The make-believe and the genuine negro were led into the servants' sitting-room, where Thad found something like a dozen servants, male and female, and he entertained the crowd with funny stories for some time, until he had rendered himself extremely popular with them. But he saw that no progress was being made in the direction of his project, and finally called the negro who had accompanied him to one side and said:

"I have got to get up-stairs. Where will I find the gentlemen of the house?"

"Hold on a minit, an' I'll see de butler," suggested the negro.

"Give him this for me," observed Thad, slipping a five-dollar bill into his hand. "Perhaps that will put him in a good humor."

"You' kin jes' bet it will!"

"You might say to him that if I accomplish my purpose, he shall have fifty."

"Dat will open his eyes, suah 'nuff!"

With that the butler left him, and presently returned with the other butler.

"What yo' want, sah?" inquired the negro, still grinning from the effects of the money.

"Where are your master and the gentlemen who are his guests?" asked Thad, by way of answer.

The fellow hesitated, and Ned interceded for Thad.

"It's all right, Johnson," he said. "Mr. Snow jes' wants to heah what dey's talkin' 'bout, an' he'll gib yo' fifty dollahs."

"I'd like to see de fifty dollahs fu'st," growled the butler. "I'm liable to lose my place wif dis goin's on."

Thad drew out a roll of bills and showed it to the negro.

"There you are," he observed. "There are several fifties there, and you won't find me mean about them if I accomplish my purpose."

"See here," growled Johnson, noticing that the detective did not use the negro dialect this time, "yo' ain't no niggah."

"That makes no difference. You will get your fifty dollahs just the same."

"Well, I can't let yo' go up foh no fifty dollahs. If yo' wants to go up, yo' got to pay me a hundred dollahs, fifty of it down and de res' when yo's dun yo' work."

"That's a bargain," acceded the detective, handing him fifty dollars. "You shall have the other fifty as soon as I come down."

The negro took the money and led the way up-stairs.

After mounting two flights, the butler stopped and remarked:

"Now dey's in dere," indicating a door from the inside of which came the sound of

loud talking, clinking of glasses, and other indications of a debauch. "Yo' kin go in dat udder rume, which j'ines it, an' der's only er portare between."

With that he quietly opened a door leading into the room indicated, and bade the detective enter.

Thad slipped in and the negro shut the door, and, to his surprise and disgust, locked it!

However, Thad concluded that it was for the purpose of preventing interference on the part of any of the other servants, and thought no more about it.

The room was in total darkness, while the adjoining one was brilliantly lighted, so that by approaching the *portiere*, and drawing it a little apart, he had no difficulty in seeing all that was going on in the next room.

The four men whom he had seen at the burial of Miss Swinburn were there, and in addition another man whom he had never seen before.

He was a large, portly person, and Thad was struck with his remarkable resemblance to Bardwell Summerville, the murdered man!

Could it be that he was a brother?

He must be a near relative.

The five men sat about a table on which were spread liquors, cigars and other luxuries, and from the maudlin appearance of the men, it was evident that they had all partaken of the liquors pretty freely.

They were discussing something, the nature of which the detective was unable to make out for a long time, but at length the large man interposed:

"No, gentlemen, I am nowise near satisfied yet. You have done very well so far, but you have not completed the work for which I employed you. That wench must be got out of the way, and in the manner I prescribed."

"But we have done that, Mr. Swinburn," pleaded old Ludlow. "It was no fault of ours that she escaped."

"Perhaps not," rejoined the large man; "but so long as she is above ground your work is not completed."

"Well, pay us part of the money," ventured Ludlow, "say twenty-five thousand dollars, and we will finish the job to-morrow night."

"No, sir, not a sou till it is done!"

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE TOILS.

THE big man's words had been uttered in such a tone of firmness and had the ring of such absolute authority about them, that his questioners were struck dumb.

For some moments silence reigned, but an expression of discontent marked the countenance of every one there except the big man, who appeared to be extremely well satisfied with himself.

"You see, gentlemen," he finally pursued, "fifty thousand dollars is a great deal of money to pay out, even for the gratification of one's fondest wishes, and it is useless for me to tell you that that is not all there is in it for you, if you succeed in this plot, and you have but little more to do now. By the way, where is the girl?"

The four conspirators glanced at each other significantly.

It appeared to Thad that their expressions showed more eloquently than words that they did not know.

But, after a moment's silence, Gonzales spoke:

"She is where we can put our hands on her whenever we are ready," he answered somewhat doggedly.

"That is not telling me where she is, doctor," retorted the big man sternly. "I want no secrets from me, you understand!"

Gonzales darted an angry glance in the big man's direction, but the latter happened to be looking in another direction just then, and did not catch it. The Cuban then glanced alternately at his fellow-conspirators, as if appealing to them for their decision as to what he should say.

And then before he decided what reply to make to the big man's question, Ludlow interposed:

"There is no need of having anything secret among us. If we cannot confide in

one another we are not friends, and had better abandon our project at once. I will take the responsibility of answering Mr. Swinburn's question."

Every one looked with an expression of amazement.

It was evident that he was about to commit a breach of trust somewhere, which would seem to indicate that there was a conspiracy within a conspiracy.

Notwithstanding the black looks of warning which the old man received from his companions, he appeared to pay no heed to them, and continued:

"The girl is in the hands of the detective who rescued her from us that night."

The three other conspirators appeared to shudder, and Thad was sure he heard them sigh, while the big man glared about over the crowd, and pushed back from the table as though to give himself more room to express himself.

"So, your story about her having been taken to Chicago by some unknown champion was all a myth, was it?" he demanded.

Everybody was silent and appeared to hold his breath.

All save the old man; he appeared as cool as ever.

"All a myth, sir," he replied. "She has never been outside of the city since she was brought back by the detective."

"Are you sure of this?" demanded the big man incredulously.

"I am."

"How do you know it?"

The old man hesitated.

"Well, for one thing, I have seen her at his house," he finally faltered. "Besides, as you know, I have a means of learning people's secrets which no other man possesses."

"So you have, Ludlow," admitted the big man, laughing. "But how are you going to carry out your scheme if this is the case?"

"That will be an easy matter."

"I don't see how."

"Do you not remember that she was with her friends before?"

"Yes."

"And we got her away?"

"But she was not with a detective, who will guard her as he would his life."

"That is true, but—"

The old man paused and indulged in a low chuckle.

"I'll make you a proposition, colonel."

"A proposition? What is it?"

"If you will agree to advance the twenty-five thousand, I will produce the woman here to-night."

The man regarded him curiously.

"Hortense Swinburn?" he finally asked.

"Nobody else."

"You can't do it."

"Will you agree to the proposition?"

"That I advance the money before you attempt it?"

"No, as soon as she has been produced."

"Yes, I will agree to that."

The old man looked at his companions triumphantly.

Their black scowl had somewhat subsided, and an expression of avarice had taken its place.

They gazed hungrily at the big man, and then glanced back at the old chap with a doubtful expression.

It was obvious that they believed he was undertaking a contract which he would never be able to carry out, and equally obvious that they were anxious to get their fingers upon the gold.

At length the old man, who had worn a self-satisfied grin all this time, resumed:

"Are you with me, gentlemen?"

There was no response for some moments, and Gonzales finally replied, in a hopeless voice:

"You are crazy, Ludlow, to make such a proposition, much less to attempt to carry out the scheme."

"Why?"

"No power on earth can get that woman out of the place where she now is, particularly to-night. If she is to be got out at all, it must be done through stratagem, and that will take time."

The old man laughed derisively.

"You are more of a novice in intrigue than I thought," he sneered.

Gonzales reddened but made no response.

"Will you lend a hand in the scheme?" pursued Ludlow.

"What is the use?" murmured the doctor.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars," laughed the old man.

"And get ourselves into the toils?"

"By no means. Or if you do, it will not take me long to get you out, as we did the other night, eh, Martin?" he ran on, addressing the fellow whom Thad had taken for a tramp. "They didn't keep us long, did they?"

"No," grunted the ruffian. "It is not easy to keep the devil in confinement, and if you are not his Satanic Majesty, you're a relative."

"We waste time," interposed the big man. "If you are going to do anything to-night, get about it!"

"That's it," assented the old man, rising from the table. "Who is with me?"

Restelle and Martin Summerville arose from the table and signified their willingness to go, but Gonzales sat still.

Everybody, including the big man, looked inquiringly at him.

"Are you not going?" demanded the big man gruffly.

Before he had time to answer, the door opened and the negro butler, Johnson, entered.

He glanced about at the men and the big man glared inquiringly at him.

The big man appeared to see something in the negro's face which indicated that he had something to communicate, for he demanded:

"What is it, Johnson?"

The negro approached him timidly, and when near enough, whispered something.

The big man's face assumed a troubled expression, which soon changed to an amused one.

"It appears, gentlemen," he broke forth with a hearty laugh, "that our conversation has all been overheard by the identical detective we have been discussing."

A look of horror was on every face instantly.

"You need have no apprehension in the matter, however," the big man hastened to assure them. "My butler has taken the precaution to lock the fellow in, and he is now at our mercy."

"At our mercy?" gasped the four men at once.

"At least he is in the next room, and I guess it will not take us long to overpower him, five to one, and he has no chance to escape."

Thad was thunderstruck.

He had never dreamed of the treacherous negro betraying him, especially as he was to be well paid for secrecy.

He saw the five men glance menacingly toward the curtain behind which he was concealed, and in spite of his coolness and bravery, a cold chill ran over him.

Moving quickly but quietly toward the door, he tried the knob, but as he feared, it was locked.

He then ran to the back windows—there were two of them—alternately, only to find them locked.

There was no other way to escape, and for an instant the detective's case looked desperate.

But it was only for an instant.

He knew that the men would attack him in another instant, most likely, and there was but one course open for him, and that was to take them by surprise.

Stepping to the curtain again, he saw the five men still standing irresolute.

None except the old man and Swinburn had arms, but they held a revolver in their hands.

"There is but one thing to do, gentlemen," observed the big man, "and that is to go in and fetch him out."

Thad was pleased to note that there was a note of fear in his voice, and also to note that the rest did not appear to relish the idea of entering the dark room where so desperate a fighter as some of them knew the detective to be was concealed, for they evidently realized that, having heard their conversation, he would be in readiness for them.

Just then a happy thought occurred to Thad.

Was it not possible that Johnson neglected

to tell his master that he (Thad) was disguised as a negro?

He considered the chances favorable enough for him to risk a little scheme which had suggested itself to him.

The negro butler had left the room, and there would be no further fear from him, so without a moment's hesitation, the detective stepped from behind the curtain out into the room in the very face of the men who were contemplating attacking him.

As he had hoped, they were so taken by surprise that not one of them moved from his place, but stared at what appeared to be a great burly negro of enormous size.

Thad grinned, and said:

"Scuze me, gen'lum."

And walked briskly toward the door, and not a man there, whether he suspected that he was the detective or not, moved a hand to stay him until he was outside of the door.

Once in the hall, Thad bounded down the stairs three steps at a time.

A moment more and he was at the front door.

And here was where his first difficulty confronted him.

The door was locked!

There was no such thing as forcing it, and he knew at once that his escape must be made in another direction.

He started back along the hall, and as he did so, he remembered the area door through which he had come into the house.

A few steps brought him to the door leading down into the basement, and as good luck would have it the door was unlocked.

To dash it open and bound down the steps to the basement, was but the work of an instant, and he was at the area door. But it was locked and bolted!

What was to be done? There might be some way of escape through the rear, if he knew the plan of the house, and he had had more time.

But the house was strange to him, and the halls were dark.

In the midst of his dismay Thad stopped to listen.

The men had already discovered his escape, evidently, for they had emerged from the room and were talking excitedly. A moment later he heard them descending the stairs.

His case was desperate.

Not a sound was to be heard in the basement, by which Thad concluded that the servants had all gone to bed, and in the midst of his desperation he dodged into the servants' sitting-room, the door of which was fortunately open.

No one was there, and Thad began to formulate a plan of escape.

He had another disguise in his pocket, and if he could only find a basin of water and soap it would not take him long to alter his appearance so that they would never recognize him.

He looked about for this purpose, but no water was to be had, and to make matters worse, the men had by this time descended to the basement, and he heard them along the hall.

A moment more they would be in upon him.

He glanced about the room, and saw that there was a closet off one side.

He was at the door in an instant, opened it and sprang inside.

Then he took time to reflect. There was but one chance for him, and that was to fight. He had the advantage of being in the dark, and they would doubtless have a light.

Drawing both his revolvers, he placed himself on the defensive and waited.

Thad had purposely left the door of the closet slightly ajar, so that he could see the men the moment they entered the room, and a moment later he saw the door of the room open and a flood of light burst in.

The next instant he saw the big man enter the room, followed by his four pals.

Now was the detective's opportunity, he thought, and taking deliberate aim at the big man's leg (he did not wish to kill him, except as a last resort) he fired.

With a howl of pain, the big man dropped the light and dashed from the room.

The next man in the procession was Martin Summerville, but Thad could no longer see any one since the light had been extinguished, and he must depend upon memory,

nevertheless, he chanced it, and blazed away again, and the result was another howl.

Then followed a sound of great confusion as though the men were scampering from the room in a state of panic.

Thad listened, and soon became satisfied that his enemies had all fled from the room, and he considered it time to make another attempt at escape.

But, before doing so, he deemed it wise to mature his plans before emerging from his place of concealment.

He had soon made up his mind what course he should pursue. He would return to the hall, ascend to the first floor and make a dash for the rear of the house and take his chances on escaping in that direction. But at that instant the closet-door was slammed shut and locked!

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN INFAMOUS PLOT.

THE action had been so sudden and unexpected that Thad had no time to prepare, and before he knew that such a thing was contemplated, the door was closed and locked.

He was at a loss to understand who had done it.

He could not believe that any of the men, panic-stricken as they were, would have had the boldness to venture into the room and close the closet door, and he concluded that it must have been the work of some one already in the room, but in concealment, when he came in.

But now he began to think, not how he had been fastened in, but how he was to get out.

It was most likely that whoever had closed the door upon him would keep watch upon him to see that he did not escape, and, in the event of said guard being armed, as he most probably would be, it would be a dangerous thing to venture out anyway.

Thad listened, but could hear no noise. If any one was in the room he was maintaining remarkable silence.

What could be the meaning of it?

Perhaps they contemplated allowing him to remain there until he should fall asleep and then attack him, or even worse, probably they would leave him there until he should starve to death.

All these horrible thoughts flashed through the detective's mind like so many blazes of lightning, and at the end of it all he had made up his mind that he would make an attempt to regain his liberty, even at the risk of his life.

Fortunately he had put his dark-lantern into his pocket, and this he now brought forth and lighted.

He then made a survey of the cramped room in which he was confined.

It appeared to be nothing more than an ordinary closet or clothes press, and a number of dresses were hanging on hooks, adding still more to his discomfort.

These he took down and dropped on the floor under his feet, and then proceeded to examine the wall.

After nearly half an hour's careful examination he was satisfied that there was no such thing as a false panel, or anything but the simple plastered wall on three sides and the door on the fourth.

So that the only chance for escape would be by way of the door.

But how was that to be gotten open?

He threw his weight against it, and found that it did not appear very solid. The only question would be, would he not arouse his enemies by the noise that would be created in bursting the door open?

Again he listened to make sure that no one was moving about in the room outside, and could hear nothing.

So he determined to make the attempt, and to that end drew as far away from the door as the narrow limits of the place would permit and threw himself with all his strength against the door.

It cracked and bent, but did not yield.

He listened to see if the noise had attracted the attention of the servants or the people up-stairs, but if it had, they remained remarkably quiet, for he could hear no sound.

Thad was about to make a battering-ram of himself a second time, when on looking

up he noticed that the hinges of the door were on the inside.

He always carried a small case of medicines and chemicals in his pocket, and just now a clever bit of stratagem suggested itself to him.

Taking out his case and selecting a small vial which was labeled "Nitric Acid," he took up a piece of linen belonging to some of the women's clothing which he had removed from the hooks, and tearing off a strip of it, twisted it into a slender swab.

This he dipped into the acid and ran it along the back of the two hinges, then returning the vial to its case, and the case to his pocket, waited developments.

When almost five minutes had elapsed he took out a large knife and pried into one of the hinges.

To his delight he found that it had been eaten away so that it would fall apart with the least exertion, so he placed the blade of the knife in the cleft at the back of the lintel of the door and gave it a gentle twist.

The lintel moved outward and would have fallen to the floor only for the lock.

He was enabled to see by the opening thus afforded that there was still no light in the room, and he felt safe to proceed with his plan, so grasping the edge of the lintel he swung it around far enough to allow him to step out.

That first moment of liberty was a thrilling one.

He did not know what instant some one would pounce upon or thrust a knife into him.

Nothing of the kind happened, however, and if there was anybody in the room he was too cowardly to show himself.

Thad had taken the precaution to shut the slide of his lantern before coming out, but after listening in vain for the sound of any one, he shot the slide again and threw the glare over the room.

No one was there, and he walked toward the door.

Whoever had locked him in the closet must have put great faith in the lock, for he had not taken the precaution to lock the room door, and the detective opened it and stepped into the hall.

This was still in darkness and no sound could be heard from above or any other part of the house.

Thad stepped back into the room and by the light of his lantern consulted his watch, and found that it was nearly three o'clock in the morning.

"The household are asleep," he mused, and then began to think of how he was to make his escape from the house.

He again tried the area door, but it was locked and bolted as it had been when he tried it before.

He then crept softly up the carpeted stairs, walked along the hall to the street door and tried it. It was still locked. Throwing a flash from his dark lantern upon it, he found that it was fastened with a heavy chain extending across the door, and that it would be impossible for any one without a key to open it.

All hope of escape in that direction was at an end, and he concluded to try the plan he had thought of while in the closet—going out the back way. But he had made but a step or two in this direction when the door-bell rung.

Now he was in a quandary.

The next instant he heard footsteps on the stairs leading up from the lower hall, and rightly guessed it was a servant coming up to open the door.

Quicker than lightning he had settled upon a plan of operations.

Stepping to the head of the stairs he awaited the coming of the servant.

In less than a minute the door opened and the servant appeared.

It was Johnson, the butler.

Putting his pistol to the negro's head, Thad commanded in a low, firm voice:

"Give me the key and then get down-stairs again in a hurry, or you are a dead man!"

Thad imagined the negro turned pale.

At all events he was badly frightened, and handed over the key to the front door without a word.

"Now, get below as quick as the good Lord will let you!" commanded the detective, and the negro needed no further orders.

The instant he had disappeared, Thad shut and locked the door leading below with one of the keys on the bunch, and then proceeded to the front door.

Meanwhile the caller or callers had repeated the ring twice, and were evidently impatient of the delay.

Thad was not long in unlocking and removing the chain and then opened the door.

By the dim light from the outside he could see that four persons, one of whom appeared to be a woman, stood on the stoop.

The man in the lead, he was not long in discovering, was the tall doctor.

"It takes you devil of a while to get the door open, Johnson!" growled the doctor as he stepped into the hall. "Why the deuce haven't you a light here?"

"Deed, sah, I didn't know as yo' wanted one," replied Thad in good darky dialect.

"What the blazes did you suppose I wanted to come in in the dark for?" roared the irate doctor, administering a kick to the detective, which he took philosophically, and proceeded to close and fasten up the door.

He took pains not to lock it, however, as he did not know how soon he might wish to escape in that direction.

Meanwhile, the party having got inside and the door being closed, the tall doctor had lighted a match and ignited the gas.

Thad managed to keep his back to the party and escaped recognition, although it is not likely that they would have given him enough thought to have recognized him anyway, as they were taken up with a more important subject.

The tall doctor opened the door leading into the drawing room near at hand, and the party entered.

As they did so Thad took occasion to steal a glance at the lady of the party, and although she was heavily veiled, he could not fail to recognize her by her clothing.

It was Hortense Swinburn!

How they had managed to get her out of the house was a mystery which Thad could not pretend to solve.

But there she was before his very eyes, and old Ludlow's promise had been fulfilled.

Thad began to think that Martin Summer-ville's declaration that the old fellow was the devil himself was not far from true.

As soon as they were inside the room, Ludlow reappeared and called "Johnson."

Thad presented himself, and the old man's eyes were too bad to recognize that he was not the real butler, and told him to go up-stairs and call his master down.

This was a ticklish piece of business, but the detective saw that he was in for it, and, bowing politely, withdrew to execute the commission, although he had no more idea where the man's room was than the man in the moon.

However, he mounted the stairs, walked along the hall a short distance and was about to knock at a door when another door opened and the big man came out.

It was not light enough in the hall for the colonel to recognize Thad, and he merely asked:

"Was that Restelle and his party came in, Johnson?"

"Yes, sah," replied the detective, imitating Johnson's voice as nearly as possible.

"Is the woman with them?"

"Yes, sah."

"Very well, Johnson, you may go to bed."

With that the big man pushed past and went down-stairs.

As soon as Thad heard him close the door of the drawing-room, he hurried down as softly as possible and tried the door of the room back of the drawing-room, and was gratified to find it opened, and that the room was in darkness.

He stepped in, and, to prevent any more interruptions, locked the door behind him.

The drawing-room and its companion were like the suite above and were separated by portieres.

So Thad stepped up to the portieres and prepared to listen as well as watch the movements of the people inside.

When he peeped through, the big man had snatched the veil from the young lady's face and was regarding her with a malignant scowl.

The poor girl stood trembling with fear and was very pale.

"So you thought you would escape me, did you, miss?" he hissed.

The young woman groaned but uttered no reply.

"Even the grave was not enough to hold you, eh?" he went on in a menacing tone. "You thought the keen detective whom you engaged could outwit the lot of us, did you?"

Still the girl made no response, but stood shaking with terror, her eyes bent on the floor.

"What do you think I ought to do with you this time?" he pursued. "I do not know but burying alive, horrible as it is, is too good for you. I shall have to invent something else more cruel this time, and something from which there will be no danger of escaping."

This appeared to have the effect of arousing the girl from her lethargy.

She raised her great dark eyes beseechingly to his face, and cried:

"Oh, why do you wish to torture me so, colonel? What have I done to deserve it?"

"What have you done? Better ask what you have not done!"

"You know that I have done nothing of my own will. What I have been the unconscious cause of I do not see why I should be punished for. Oh, have mercy!"

"Mercy is out of the question, Hortense," he answered in a gentler tone. "There was a time when there was mercy and happiness for you, but you would not accept them, and it is now too late. Even now, as I look at you my heart almost fails me, and I do not know but I would be willing to repeat the proposition that I made a year ago."

"To become your wife?" she groaned.

"Not exactly. The next thing to it, though," he said with a malicious grin.

"Brute!" she gasped, and it could be seen that her soul uttered the word rather than her lips. "Let me die the most cruel death that you can devise before such a fate as that!"

"Suit yourself," he interposed with a shrug. "This is the last time I will ever make you the offer. It is rather late to-night," he went on, consulting his watch, "but to-morrow night we will begin a series of tortures upon you that will shame the cruelist inventions of the inquisition."

The girl sunk unconscious upon the floor, but the brutal man paid no attention to her, and turned to his associates.

"Ludlow," he said, "call the butler and have him put this woman in the little room back of the library. It is lined with iron and there is not much likelihood of her escaping to-night or any other time, especially as her detective is in safe-keeping. To-morrow night we will begin a series of tortures that will even make you tremble, old man, hardened as you are."

"What will it be?" asked the old villain, rubbing his hands gleefully.

"We will practice the Chinese torture on her."

"What is that, colonel?"

"Keeping her awake until she dies. It will take a week or more, but for genuine refinement of torture, there has never been anything like it invented among Christians."

Even the hardened old sinner shuddered at the thought, but he hurried to the door with the evident purpose of calling the butler.

Thad anticipated his intention, and lest he should go to the back door and, finding it locked, suspect something wrong, came out into the hall in time to meet him.

"Johnson," said the old man, "there is a woman in the drawing-room who requires your attention."

"Yes, sah," returned Thad.

"Your master wants you to confine her in the little room back of the library. You know where it is, of course?"

"Yes, sah."

CHAPTER XIX.

A PLEASANT SURPRISE.

It was with some apprehension that Thad returned to the drawing-room, as he expected the colonel would surely recognize him, but he was agreeably disappointed.

Swinburn was too much taken up with

congratulating his friends to pay any attention to the "nigger."

He was in the act of shaking hands with old Ludlow as Thad entered and appeared to be in high spirits.

"I must acknowledge that you are a trump, old man!" he cried as he wrung Ludlow's hand again and again. "I never could have believed the thing possible if I had not seen it with my own eyes. How on earth did you manage it?"

The old man laughed.

Thad listened for his answer, for he was as anxious as Swinburn to know how the old man had managed to get the girl out of his house at that time of night.

Meanwhile the detective was attending to the girl herself, who was still lying prone on the floor where she had fallen in a swoon.

He bent over her and chafed her forehead and hands, and although he was anxious about her recovery, his anxiety to hear how the old villain Ludlow had succeeded in abducting her impelled him to spend more time over her than was absolutely necessary.

"Why, you see," began the old man, "we had the advantage of the detective's absence from home, to begin with."

"Yes, yes," interposed the colonel, rubbing his hands gleefully. We had him here, safely locked in the closet down-stairs. Go on, Mr. Ludlow!"

"So far, so good," pursued the old man. "The next thing was to invent some story to tell the girl in order to get her out. I knew that she would recognize me in my natural make-up, but that did not bother me a particle."

"You disguised, of course?" interposed the colonel.

"Yes. With a pair of large spectacles and the addition of a false nose, my mother would not know me."

"You sly old dog!" interrupted Swinburn, poking him in the ribs. "But go on."

"It was pretty late to disturb any one, but I had formulated an excuse, and we went to the house. It required several rings to arouse any one, and when the lady—the detective's wife, came to the door at last, I told her that her husband was at the Central Station and had sent me to bring the young lady, Miss Swinburn. She was loth to believe me until I showed her a note from her husband."

"A note from the detective?" laughed the colonel.

"Certainly."

"Where did you get that?"

"Where do you imagine?"

"Wrote it, you sly old rascal!"

"There are ways of doing these things, you know, colonel."

"So I perceive."

"As further evidence that I came from the station, the boys here were dressed as policemen."

"As policemen?"

"Yes."

"What have they done with their uniforms?" inquired the colonel, glancing at the two men.

"Oh, they removed them in the carriage where they put them on. It would not do to appear on the street with them on, you know."

"True enough."

"Well, when I had succeeded in convincing her that the thing was all right she went for the girl. It took some time to get her aroused from her sleep and dressed, but she finally appeared, and then I had to explain matters to her. She wanted to know why the detective wanted her to go to the station at that late hour."

"And you had an answer for her?"

"Of course. Nothing easier. I told her that some of her enemies had been arrested and the detective wanted her to come down and identify them."

"Did that satisfy her?"

"Yes. She said that the detective had done so much for her that she could not refuse to go, and was soon ready. Once in the carriage, the rest was simple enough."

"Well, you beat the Old Nick himself!" cried the colonel, grasping his hand again. And then suddenly turning to Thad who was still working over the fainting girl, he bawled:

"What are you doing there, you black rascal? Why don't you pick the wench up and lug her into the room, as I ordered? Never mind bringing her to. She'll come to quick enough when left to herself!"

Thad made no reply, but raising the girl in his arms started to leave the room.

When he reached the door, however, and was compelled to release one hand to open the door, the girl suddenly recovered consciousness, opened her eyes and looked about her in a wild sort of way.

Finally her eyes fell upon Thad's face, and in spite of his disguise, she recognized him.

"Oh Mr. Burr!" she cried. "I am so glad it is you! I have had such a dreadful dream. I thought that those horrid men had carried me off again and were going to put me through some sort of terrible torture. And to think that it was all a dream, and that I am with you!"

It had been vain that Thad had tried to silence her.

She would come out with the whole harangue.

The men in the room stood transfixed with amazement for a second, and could make no move toward stopping the detective, who, seeing that his only chance for escape was hasty retreat, was getting away as rapidly as possible.

Thus he got into the hall before any of them recovered their presence of mind.

Then quickly putting the girl upon her feet, he hastily closed the door, and in a twinkling had put the key in the lock and turned it, locking the party in the drawing-room.

With a single bound he reached the door of the back room and in a fraction of a second had that secured also.

It was now impossible for the men to escape, and Thad could take his time in leaving the house.

Nevertheless, he did not tarry, but taking the girl by the hand made his way to the front door at once, opened it and departed.

At the first corner they were fortunate enough to espy a cab returning from somewhere, and Thad hailed it.

"Three hundred Mulberry street," was the detective's order to the driver as he took his seat.

"Then that old man told the truth?" observed Miss Swinburn with wondering eyes.

"What old man?"

"The old man whom you sent to the house."

"I understand," replied Thad, laughing. "No, my dear girl, he did not tell you the truth. I never sent him to the house at all. That was old Ludlow, and the whole scheme was to get you into the hands of your enemies again."

"Why are you going to the Central Station, then?"

"To get a detail of police and return there and arrest that whole crowd while I have got them corraled."

"And you want me to return with you?"

"To Swinburn's house?"

"Yes."

"No. As soon as I get to the station I will have the hackman take you home, and I will return to the house with the police."

"Oh I am so glad! I was afraid you wanted me to return there, and I have such a horror of meeting any of those men."

"It will not be necessary. But will you be afraid to return home alone?"

"No, sir, I guess not."

"However, I will have a policeman go with you to prevent the possibility of your getting into trouble."

"That will probably be better. But you have been so kind to me, Mr. Burr. I do not know how I shall ever repay you."

"Don't mention it, I beg. It is all in the line of my duty."

"But you have risked so much for me."

"That as nothing. We detectives are compelled to risk our lives every day for less worthy people than you, Miss Swinburn."

By this time the carriage had reached the station and Thad sprung out.

It was daylight by this time, and Mulberry street was thronged with pedestrians.

The detective called a policeman and told him to keep an eye on the young lady in the cab, and then ran into the station.

He related his case to the sergeant at the

desk, after telling the latter who he was, for the officer thought at first that he had a genuine negro before him, and a detail of a dozen policemen was placed at Thad's disposal.

When he emerged from the station with the detail at his heels, he put one in charge of the young lady and told him to see her home, and by that time the patrol wagon had driven round.

Thad and his escort climbed into the wagon after which it rattled away.

Inside of ten minutes the wagon stopped before the house on Second avenue, and the detective sprung out and ascended the stoop.

As he had taken the precaution to retain possession of the keys, it was not necessary to ring the bell, and unlocking the door, Thad walked into the hall, followed by the file of policemen.

"Where is the game?" asked the captain.

"In this room," replied the detective, pointing at the door.

"We had better be ready for business, then, as those fellows will undoubtedly be on the fight."

"Yes, and ready for us," added Thad.

With that he put the key into the door and turned it.

"Now ready!" he whispered.

Every man drew his revolver and stood in readiness for a charge.

The next instant the door was sprung open.

The room was empty!

Thad stood as one suddenly paralyzed.

The captain looked at him for an explanation, but Thad could only shake his head in dismay.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked the captain.

"Ask me an easy one," rejoined the detective. "They were all in there—five of them—twenty minutes ago, and as you saw, the door was still locked."

"They didn't escape through the key-hole, that is certain," laughed the captain, walking into the room and looking about.

Without further comment, Thad joined in the investigation, and the two rooms were thoroughly gone over, but without making any discovery as to how the men had effected their escape.

Thad was about to give it up in despair, when he noticed something peculiar about the fireplace. A closer scrutiny disclosed the fact that the hearth stood about an inch above the level of the floor.

This led the shrewd Special to believe that there was some sort of mechanism about it not common about fireplaces in general, and he set to examining it still closer.

This attracted the captain, who came over and asked:

"What have you discovered, Burr?"

"I don't know exactly, but I believe that fireplace is a secret outlet of some kind."

The captain laughed.

"What makes you think so?"

"Look at that hearth."

"Well, what of it?"

"Don't you see that it stands an inch higher than the floor?"

"Yes, but that is only some bad workmanship on the part of the tilers or whoever do this sort of work."

But by the time he had finished the sentence Thad had made another discovery.

He noticed that none of the ornaments on the side of the mantel was worn smooth from handling, while none of the others was, and taking the hint from the fact, he pulled down on it, when he was gratified to see the fireplace, grate, hearth and all, sink a foot or so below the level of the floor, and then swing back, disclosing a flight of stairs.

He darted a triumphant glance at the captain, who stood with distended eyes and mouth, but speechless with amazement.

"That accounts for the escape of the game," observed Thad.

"Undoubtedly," replied the captain, dryly. "But who in thunder but Thad Burr would have made the discovery?"

But the detective, instead of making any reply, had walked on to the first step and was preparing to descend.

"You are not going down, are you, detective?" cried the captain, in dismay.

"Why not?" was Thad's cool rejoinder.

"You cannot tell where those stairs lead

to or what dangers await you at the bottom."

"And I never will know if I don't investigate."

With that Thad began the descent.

The captain held his breath.

He evidently expected to see the detective drop out of sight any minute or roll off the stairs shot through with a bullet.

But, Thad went on down, and in a few moments was at the bottom of the stairs, which extended no further than the basement of the building, and found himself in a narrow corridor that led to the back yard.

Following this, he soon came out into a court at the rear of the house.

A gate opened into an alley-way, and the parties in making their escape had been in too great a hurry to fasten it.

This explained all; the men had escaped to the street, and had disappeared long before the detective's return.

Returning to the room above, Thad reported what he had discovered, but neither he nor the captain was satisfied until they had made a search of the premises.

But all to no purpose; no one but the servants was to be found in the house or about the grounds, and the search was finally abandoned.

"Well, I am sorry to have brought you up here for nothing, old man," observed Thad. "But you see how it was."

"I understand it all," remarked the captain. "All that surprises me is, that they should have been able to get the better of you. They are the first ones I ever heard of doing it."

"Ah, but, my boy," laughed the detective. "I am not done with those chaps yet. This is their inning. Wait till it comes mine."

"I'll trust you for getting even with them, detective."

When he had taken his leave of the captain and his squad and they had driven away, Thad called a cab and started for home.

His way led across by Tompkins Market, and early as it was, he could not resist the temptation of having the driver turn out of his way far enough to pass old Mike's curiosity shop.

He did not alight, but as the cab passed slowly by the detective put his head out and looked into the dingy shop.

He could see old Mike poking about among his curious wares, but he was not the only person Thad saw.

A man was bending over examining something, and finally brought it to the light. The instant the detective caught sight of his face, he recognized it, for it was the face of Martin Summerville!

CHAPTER XX.

AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY.

At sight of Summerville Thad sprung out of the cab, and, telling the driver to wait for him, entered the curiosity shop.

Now, if there was anything in this world that old Mike detested more than a small boy, it was a negro.

Thad had forgotten this fact, if indeed, he ever knew it, and had, as a matter of fact, forgotten for the moment that he was black.

The instant he entered the door old Mike looked up and saw him, and the next moment grasped his favorite weapon, a flat-iron.

"Git out wid yez, ye dom'd nayger!" yelled the old man, making a rush for the detective.

Thad was in a sad quandary.

If he revealed his identity he would lose his prisoner, and if he did not he must have a collision with old Mike.

He decided upon the latter, however; but, instead of trying to conciliate the Irishman, he made a spring for him, caught and wrenched the flat iron from his hand and shoved him into a corner with the solemn admonition:

"Now you stay there and mind your own business, or I'll punch your head for you!"

So far from quieting the old chap, it had the opposite effect, and he began shouting murder and police at the top of his voice.

In little more than an instant a crowd was attracted and began pouring into the place, among them a couple of policemen.

"What's up, Mike?" demanded one of the officers.

"The nayger!" cried Mike.

"Well, what of him?"

"He do be thryin' to kill me entoirely!"

While this dialogue was in progress Thad managed to slip his card into the policeman's hand, which, when he had read it, caused him to stare at the detective in wonder, and finally sneer:

"Say, w'at d'ye take me fer?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Thad.

"D'ye tink ye kin 'stuff me wid dat? Youse is no detective! I'm dead on to youse. See?"

Thad was in a sadder dilemma than ever.

The ruffian had noticed the dispute between the detective and the policeman, and, growing suspicious, was edging toward the door.

"Don't make a fool of yourself!" whispered Thad in desperation. "I have business here, and while you are talking my prisoner is about to give me the slip."

"I've got business wid youse, me fine fella!" retorted the ignorant policeman.

"Youse'll jes' come wid me, see?"

"Look here!" cried Thad, losing all patience, "if I go to the station with you, after the explanation I have given you, it will cost you your badge. That man going out the door is a murderer, whom I've been tracing for nearly a month, and if he escapes you will pay for it, mind what I tell you!"

"Dat's all right," sneered the cop. "I've heerd ducks like youse quack before. Come on!"

Seeing that there was nothing else for it, Thad accompanied him as far as the door, when, as luck favored the detective, Captain Finn, who had accompanied him on his expedition to the house on Second avenue a couple of hours before, came along on his way home.

Thad hailed him, and as the captain had already seen him in this disguise, he recognized the detective at once.

"Hello, detective!" he cried. "What's up now?"

"I was on the point of nabbing one of our game," replied Thad, "when this smart Aleck took into his head to arrest me."

"Arrest you?"

"That's the word, captain."

"What for?"

"Ask him."

The captain looked at the policeman for an explanation.

"What does this mean, young man?" demanded the captain.

"W'y, dis man was in de junk-shop dere raisin' a disturbance, an' de ole man asked me to run him in, an' I was a-goin' to do it, dat's all."

"Don't you know who that gentleman is?"

"Nope. He said he was Detective Burr, but how'd I know, w'en he was made up as er coon?"

"Well, the best thing you can do is to apologize to this gentleman for a bad break, and get along about your business, for if he is inclined to report you, away goes your badge. What has become of your game, detective?"

"Oh, he's made his escape long ago."

"Well, by thunder! If you don't prefer charges against this man, I will. We've got no use for such blunderers on the force. You made yourself known to the officer, didn't you?"

"Yes. I gave him my card, and told him that I was tracing a culprit, but it appeared that he was bent on making a record."

"He'll make a record quick enough!"

The policeman was thoroughly alarmed by this time, and apologized abjectly, but the captain was bent on beheading him and extorted the promise from the detective that he would be on hand to testify to the charges, and thus they parted.

When Thad reached home he found that Miss Swinburn had arrived safely, and as soon as she heard that he had come she hastened to meet him.

"I do not know how I shall ever repay you for all you have done for me, Mr. Burr," she repeated for the hundredth time, as soon as she came into his presence.

"I beg you will not speak of it, Miss Swinburn," he responded in a kindly tone.

"And I would also ask you to be a little more cautious in future, at least until I have run down these dreadful enemies of yours."

"It was all my fault," interposed the detective's wife. "I should never have allowed her to have gone. But I was never so completely and cleverly deceived in my life."

"That old chap is a clever one, and there is no mistake. Upon the whole, I cannot blame either of you. He would deceive the keenest of us."

After some more general conversation, Thad addressed himself to the young lady.

"You have expressed yourself as ignorant of a good deal of the mystery surrounding this dreadful vendetta, Miss Swinburn," he began, "and I have had no reason to doubt the truthfulness of all your statements. But there are some facts connected with it of which I believe you possess a knowledge, and an acquaintance with them on my part would materially aid me in accomplishing the end for which I am striving. Who, for example, is the man they call Colonel Swinburn?"

The girl shuddered at the sound of the name and her eyes sought the floor.

"Albert Edward Swinburn, is his name," she finally replied in a low tone.

"What relation is he to you? for he must be some relation."

"He is my cousin, on my father's side."

"Then, as I understand, the Swinburns and Summervilles are related by marriage?"

"Yes, sir; my mother was a Summerville and my father was a Swinburn. But we are blood relations. My father and mother were cousins."

"I see. And this Albert Edward belongs to the faction antagonistic to your branch of the family?"

"Yes, sir."

"From what I gathered last night, or this morning, rather, he once made you an offer of marriage."

"He did. It was a long time ago—only a short time after Martin went away. He pretended to be friendly to our family then, and asked me to marry him, but as he belonged to the other branch of the family, my parents would not consent to the match. He was furious over the matter and took revenge by a series of persecutions. I was fiery-tempered like all of our family and retaliated by exposing some of his questionable transactions, which caused his arrest and imprisonment. This naturally stirred his wrath still more deeply, and he vowed the darkest vengeance."

"As soon as he was released from prison he procured my abduction and tried to force me into relations with him which I regard as worse than death, but I succeeded in escaping from him."

"Could he have had any motive in murdering, or procuring the murder of your uncle and cousin?"

"Undoubtedly."

"What, for example?"

"He had several motives. In the first place, they were my protectors, as well as his natural enemies; and besides, there is a property consideration."

"A property consideration?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"That I cannot tell you exactly, but I know that it is very desirable for him to get certain members of the family out of the way in order to come in possession of a large estate which has been in litigation for many years."

"What other relatives have you besides the remaining members of your Uncle Bardwell Summerville's family?"

"Oh, they are numerous on the other side."

"Friendly to you?"

"No, sir. There is but one family that is friendly to us. They live in Chester, and are very poor. Their poverty, I think, has protected them from the outrages the rest of us have been subjected to. All the balance of the family have been wiped out."

"I believe you told me in a former interview that you had a brother."

"I had, yes."

"But he is dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"Killed?"

"Yes, sir. At least his death was mysterious, and we always supposed it to have been murder."

"Were none of these cases ever investigated?"

"Oh, yes, sir. They were all investigated."

"To what end?"

"Nothing."

"Could the authorities never discover who the guilty parties were in any of the numerous outrages?"

"Never. You see, the perpetrators were people of power and wealth and that goes a long way."

"Perhaps, in England."

"But not in this country, eh?"

"I hope not."

The girl smiled sadly.

"I believe you told me you had arrested two of my enemies and had them locked up, some two weeks ago?"

"So I did," replied Thad, coloring.

"And where are they now?" she asked with the least note of sarcasm in her tone.

"But that was effected through the cunning of old Ludlow, and not, as you imagine, through any collusion with the police," he retorted hotly.

"I trust that that may be the case," said the girl simply, "and that you may not have the same obstacles to contend with that the detectives had on the other side."

"I know I shall have no such trouble, Miss Swinburn," answered the detective testily.

"Our police and judges are honest and honorable in this country!"

But, even while he was uttering this laudatory sentence, his mind reverted to the episode of that very morning, and, try as he would to banish the thought, he could not help but wonder if the policeman who had arrested him had not had something to do with the rascal he was after—if, in short, there had not been collusion between them.

After a nap of a couple of hours, Thad dressed himself without any disguise and called upon his old friend Mike of the curiosity-shop.

"I say, Mike," were his first words, "what was the matter with you this morning?"

"The matter wid me, sor?" cried the old man in surprise. "There was nothing the matter wid me. Phwoy d'yez ask, Oi dunno?"

"You appeared to be excited, and was about to kill a nigger with a flat-iron, I heard."

"Oh, the dom nayger? Bad seran to him, an' the black race he belongs to! If he ivver comes in here again, Oi'll break the durthy av him wid a flat-iron! Oi will that!"

"No you won't do anything of the kind, Mike," laughed Thad.

"Oi'd loike to know phwoy Oi won't," snorted the old man.

"Because that same 'nayger' was your humble servant, Mike."

"Phwat?"

"I was the 'nayger'?"

"Och, what is it ye be tellin' me?"

"That is true, Mike."

The old man regarded him incredulously for some moments, and shook his gray old head.

"Och, sure," he said at last, in slow, meditative tones, "now that Oi look at the soize an' shape av yez, Oi do remimber that Oi was half inclined to think it was yerself all the toime; but, begorra, yez looked that loike a nayger that yez'd 'a' been welcome in Thompson strate, sure."

"I have no doubt. But, Mike, did you notice that your tramp was in here again?"

"Only wance."

"This morning, I mean."

"Sure, an' he was not."

"Then your eyes are getting bad, for he was in here when I came in, and it was to capture him, that I came into your place. I would have gobbled him, too, only for you and that ass of a policeman."

"Sure, sor, an' Oi'm sorry, if that's a fact."

"It is too late to be sorry now. But what did the tramp leave the last time he was in?"

The old man poked about, and finally brought a bronze candlestick of a very old and quaint pattern.

"This is all, sor," observed old Mike.

"But, as you'll see, it has no mark on it, so Oi didn't think ye'd care for it."

Thad took the article and examined it, and as Mike had said, the mysterious mark was missing.

"However, I'll take it, Mike," said the detective. "Now tell me, did you not notice a man in here this morning when the negro came in?"

"Oi did."

"And you did not recognize him?"

"No, sor; Oi nivver saw him before."

"Which proves my assertion that your eyes are failing you. That man was none other than the former tramp. The only difference was that he had on better clothes this time."

"Yez don't tell me!"

"That is true. But, what did he leave, or did he leave anything, Mike?"

"He did."

And the old man hobbled away to another part of the shop, and returned with an article and handed it to the detective.

The latter started at sight of the object.

It was a casket, made of bronze and very highly wrought, but, like the candlestick, it was unmarked by the mysterious and fatal sign.

Nevertheless, Thad bought it and took it away with him.

CHAPTER XXI.

A RECRUIT FROM THE ENEMY.

THAD did not open his casket on going home, his mind being set upon another object.

He had secured sufficient evidence, he believed, to warrant him in arresting Colonel Swinburn and his gang wherever he might find them, and he lost no time in procuring a warrant for that purpose.

He anticipated a good deal of trouble in finding his men, now that they knew he was after them, and also knowing, as they must, that he had secured a good deal of evidence while masquerading in his various disguises.

But these facts did not retard him in the least. He had set his heart upon clearing up the mystery and arresting the parties connected with the vendetta, and he was determined to do it at all hazards.

Disguising himself by the addition of a stubby beard and a close-cropped wig, and attiring himself in a plain tweed suit of clothes, he made his way to the Second avenue house between eleven and twelve o'clock that same night.

He had learned enough about the character of the men with whom he had to deal to know that any open attack must be a failure, as they were prepared to escape at the slightest warning.

But, fortunately, his last expedition had taught him some of their means of entrance and exit, and he proposed to avail himself of them.

Before going, however, he had had a conference with the superintendent and secured a detail of a dozen men who were instructed to meet the detective on the corner of Second avenue and First street.

The squad was commanded by Captain Finn, the same man that had accompanied him the night before, and who was in perfect sympathy with Thad.

"What are we to do while you are reconnoitering inside, detective?" asked the captain.

"Place a portion of your men in the front, but on the opposite side of the street so as not to attract attention, and the rest, with yourself, captain, in the narrow alley that runs through the block at this point. As soon as they are routed they will make a break for the secret exit, which leads out into this alley, and I want you to head them off."

Having giving these orders, Thad went to the rear of the house, and, still possessing the bunch of keys which he had taken from the butler, let himself in at the back gate.

A small door opened from the rear of the house into the corridor he had discovered that morning. The door was locked, but he had a duplicate key and soon effected his entrance.

Passing along the corridor for some distance, he came to the foot of the narrow stairway leading up to the fireplace.

It was pitch dark, and he was compelled to grope his way, but he managed to find the stairway and at once began to climb up.

But one thing that worried him, and that was how he was to operate the automatic fireplace from the lower side. But he argued that as the men undoubtedly entered as well as went out by that route, there must be a way of operating the clever mechanical apparatus from the outside.

He was soon at the top of the stairway, and stopped to listen.

Instead of the dead silence that had characterized the house the previous night, the sound of loud talking came to him from above.

This struck him as strange so soon after the narrow escape the men had had that very morning, but showed that they were not particularly oppressed with fear.

Again the detective's mind reverted to what the young woman had hinted about the power of her enemy's money, and he could not help but think that whether there was any truth in it or not, they themselves evidently placed a good deal of faith in it.

Thad remembered that the fireplace into which the stairway led was in the room back of the drawing-room. If the parties who were talking were, as the night before, in the drawing-room, he would be tolerably safe in entering the room behind it, but if they were in the room into which he would have to go, the case would be different.

He listened attentively, but could not make out where the speakers were located. Sometimes they appeared to be at some distance away, as though in the front room, and again it seemed as though they were directly over his head.

At length, however, he concluded to take his chances, and lighted his dark lantern. Flashing it about the ceiling over his head, he made a careful survey of the arrangement of the fireplace to ascertain, if possible, how the device was operated, but in vain.

There were a couple of flanges screwed to the lower edge of the joists, which he easily guessed were tracks upon which the four small trucks or castors on the bottom of what from the under side appeared to be a simple platform, rested, and from this he knew that the platform upon which was constructed the hearth, was made to lower so that the castors rested on the tracks, when the whole structure was made to glide along till the opening of the stairway was clear.

But the question was, how was the device operated from where he now stood?

He tried every bolt-head, pushed at everything that had the remotest resemblance to a spring or lever and tugged successively at every brace. But all in vain. The thing would not budge from its position, and the detective was in despair.

Again and again he went over the bottom of the platform, holding the light so that not a joint or seam escaped his notice.

The only thing about the whole structure to which he could not assign a legitimate purpose was a round hole a quarter of an inch in diameter near one side of the platform, but he could not imagine that it had anything to do with the operation of the device, and if it had, it was of no benefit to him, as there must be some sort of instrument with which to operate it.

Thad reflected whether he had anything in his pocket that would pass into the aperture, thinking that he might try the experiment of poking something into it, and as he reflected he mechanically took out the bunch of keys before referred to.

Almost the first thing that attracted his attention was a key with a perfectly round shank, minus wards on the outside but containing a number in the hollow end.

Without a moment's hesitation he placed the key in the hole and gave it a twist.

Instantly he heard a creaking sound and the platform began to descend so rapidly that he was compelled to step down hurriedly to prevent it from striking his head.

It was but a few seconds from the time he had placed the key in the hole that the opening was clear for him to ascend at pleasure, and he was delighted to see that the room above was in darkness, as it had been the previous night.

He could still hear the talking, which was

more distinct than before, and he now understood that it was in the drawing-room.

Thad lost no time in ascending into the room, and then by pulling upward on the ornament he had discovered that morning, replaced the mechanical fireplace as he had found it. He also took the precaution of wrenching the ornament off so as to render the device inoperative from that point.

This he did to prevent the possible hasty retreat of the prisoners in case they attempted to escape in that direction when cornered.

He then placed himself close to the *portiere* and looked into the next room.

All five men were assembled and were having a hot discussion over something.

Thad had to listen long before he discovered that the other four were upbraiding Martin Summerville about something he had done, and the fellow was trying as best he could to defend himself against the combined attack.

"It is useless for you to deny it," the colonel was heard to say. "The things have been traced to old Mike's, and you have been seen there more than once. Besides old Mike admits that he has had some dealings with you, although he would not say what he had bought of you. Your admission to Ludlow about seeing the pistols in the detective's possession while you were on a spree two weeks ago, and your agitation when he accused you, prove that you are guilty."

"But, what's the harm, even admitting that I did sell the things?" pleaded Martin, with a hang-dog look. "They were of little value and I had to have money."

"You had to have money?"

"Yes. You have been so mean since we went into this thing that I haven't had enough to live on."

"Nonsense! I have given you a hundred dollars. That would have been ample to have carried you along if you would not gamble."

"So you admit selling the things?" put in old Ludlow.

Martin was silent.

"Have you any idea what the possession of these things by the detective is likely to result in?" added Gonzales.

Still no response.

The fellow still hung his head and remained silent.

"Yes, that's the thing," interposed the colonel. "It is not the loss of the relics so much as the clue to our doings they will give."

"I don't see how," murmured the accused.

"Then you are dumber than I gave you credit for. Was not every article marked with the sign of the Scarlet Brand?"

"Well?"

"Well, it is well known to us that the detective is in possession of letters similarly marked, not only the one sent to himself, but the one sent to Bardwell Summerville. Suppose it should have come to the point of any of us being arrested, would not the fact that these things had belonged to me, and were marked the same as the threatening letters, go a long way toward proving our guilt?"

"But there is another thing missing which I neglected to mention," interpolated Ludlow, "and which old Mike says was brought there this morning."

"What is that?" demanded the colonel eagerly.

"The Ludlow casket," replied the old man in a tremulous voice, as though the thing deeply concerned him personally.

Thad thought of the name of Ludlow on the holster pistols.

"Great God!" exclaimed the colonel, turning pale. "Did you secure it, John?"

"No! It was gone!"

"Great Heaven! I wonder who got it?"

"This same detective."

The colonel was too much overcome to speak for some moments and arose and paced the floor like a maniac.

"The game is up, then," he finally faltered in a feeble voice, wholly unlike his own. "We must leave everything and get away at once. There is evidence in that casket that will send every one of us to the gallows! Let me see," and he snatched up a newspaper from the table and began scanning its columns.

"There is a steamer sailing tomorrow afternoon. I go by that. The rest of you may go when or where you like."

"And leave everything?" gasped old Ludlow.

"Yes."

"And the girl?" suggested Gonzales.

"Let her go to the—"

"But," interrupted the old man, "with the girl goes the property. We cannot give that up now, after all we have sacrificed for it."

"For the present that will have to go, too," replied the colonel coldly. "My life is of more value to me than all the property in England."

"That is very well for you to say, colonel—you who have plenty, but it is different with us, and we have had to stand the brunt. We have not even got the twenty-five thousand yet, and you say you cannot pay it until you get the property. I, for one, won't stand it!"

The colonel glared at him for a moment, and then appeared to undergo a change of mind.

"Yes," he said, in a conciliatory voice. "I have enough left to pay you, and you shall have your money."

"When?"

"Before I sail for England."

"That won't do. I must have something more definite than that. You promised that we should have the money as soon as we produced the girl. We produced the girl, and because the detective outwitted us, or you rather, and got away with her, you put us off again. Now you say before you sail. I, for one, demand my money now!"

"I too," added Gonzales.

"And I," put in the tall doctor, who up to that time had remained silent. "We have waited long enough."

Strange to say, Martin did not urge his claim.

The colonel stood irresolute and thoughtful for a moment, and then said:

"Gentlemen, come up-stairs."

With that he started to leave the room.

The three who had spoken about the money followed, and finally Martin arose and took up the rear.

When the colonel reached the door and put his hand upon the knob, he turned about and glared back at Martin. The latter shrugged his shoulders and resumed his seat. The rest of the men then proceeded up-stairs.

As soon as they were gone Martin buried his face in his hands and groaned. He sat thus for some moments and then got up, glanced about him timidly and then mused:

"Curse it! It is all on account of my want of courage. Here I have sacrificed more than any of them, and now I am to be beaten out of any share in the reward. Curse the luck! I wish I had carried out the resolution I once had, of going to that detective and giving the gang away!"

He paused a moment and paced up and down the floor thoughtfully.

At length he broke out vehemently:

"If I don't, curse me! That is exactly what I will do. It is time enough yet. I will go to the detective and put all the evidence in his hands and assist him to capture them. In so doing I will befriend her, a thing I should have done long ago, had I not been the coward I was."

So saying he picked up his hat and started for the door.

As he opened the door, Thad caught the sound of laughter from up-stairs.

The outcast glanced upward, and muttered:

"Yes, curse you! Laugh and drink and gloat over your blood-bought gold! You will laugh in another key before another twenty-four hours, or my name is not Martin Summerville!"

He ceased speaking, closed the door and passed out. A moment later Thad heard the front door close.

Now was the detective's time for action.

He hurried from behind the curtain, crossed the drawing-room and hastened out the front door, but taking care to leave the bolt back so that he could enter without trouble.

He had intended to overtake Martin, but when he reached the street the fellow had disappeared, so he hastened to the rear of the house and summoned Captain Finn.

"Leave your squad here and bring the

other one, captain, and be quick about it. We've got them this time, sure."

Five minutes later a file of policemen marched up the stairs to the room where the revelers were.

CHAPTER XXII.

LIVELY WORK.

WHEN they reached the second floor both the captain and the detective stopped to listen at the door.

The sound of revelry was even louder than before the detective had left the house, showing that the men had improved the time in the matter of drinking.

"I guess there is no doubt about them being there now," whispered the captain.

"And in a very mellow condition," supplemented Thad.

"A good condition to find them in."

"Yes."

Meanwhile Thad was attempting to find a key among his bunch which fitted in the lock of the door. He tried successively every key of the bunch, but to no purpose.

None of them would fit.

"What's the matter?" whispered the captain.

"None of the keys will fit this door," rejoined the detective.

"Where did you get the keys?"

"Of the butler."

"Perhaps this is a private room to which the old man did not allow his butler to have access?"

"That's just it," declared Thad, in dismay. "What shall we do?"

"The same as Paddy does with the potatoes when they won't dig themselves; we'll have to dig them."

"There is just the trouble. If we make any noise those fellows will find their holes like so many mice, and the deuce of it is, there is no such thing as our finding their holes. Still, there is nothing else to be done, so we may as well—"

At that moment he thought of the other door.

In an instant he was at the other door and tried the knob, but like the first, it was locked.

Again he had recourse to his keys.

This time he was more successful, for one of the keys fitted into the lock.

The next moment the door was open and he turned to the captain and beckoned him to march his men in.

The reveling in the other room grew louder and louder, and now some of them began to sing.

Forming his men in a line directly behind the portieres, Thad beckoned the captain to follow his example, and grasping the curtain on one side, while the captain grasped it on the other, at a signal each man drew his curtain back simultaneously, leaving the file of policemen in full view of the astonished culprits.

Colonel Swinburn jumped to his feet and made an attempt to draw his revolver, but he was too late.

Thad already had a bead on him, and cried in a calm tone:

"No use, colonel! The jig is up! Surrender!"

"Hell and furies!" hissed the colonel, grinding his teeth. "This is the work of that cursed Martin!"

"It was nothing of the kind, colonel," laughed Thad. "It's the work of that cursed detective you were speaking of a while ago. I have a warrant for your arrest, Mr. Albert Edward Swinburn!"

By this time the desperate colonel had regained a good deal of his assurance and some of his swagger.

"My arrest?" he said, with a sneering laugh. "Upon what charge, pray?"

"Murder!"

The colonel laughed derisively.

"Come, I like that!" he cried. "Do you hear that, gentlemen?" he went on, turning to his companions with a bland smile. "This fellow says he arrests me for murder! What do you think of that?"

The three men made a feeble attempt at levity, but it was a failure.

They had risen and were huddled together, with blanched faces, and shaking with terror.

"What shall we do, gentlemen?" he ran on in a cheerful voice. "Humor him and go along?"

He received no response from his companions, who stood with downcast faces, and appeared to have lost faith in the power of their money. Or perhaps they had lost faith in the colonel who had to furnish the money.

Whatever the cause, they appeared the very reverse of cheerful, and could not be induced to smile, although the scoundrel said some very droll things.

Possibly they were thinking of the fate that was in store for them, and possibly the shadow of the gallows shut out the sunshine of hope at that moment.

"Come, cheer up!" bawled the colonel. "You look as though you were on the point of being led to the scaffold. Brace up! The gallows is a long way off yet, and even if it were in sight, there is no good of feeling sad over it. It's soon over. A drop and a jerk, and there you are ready for your wings."

Thad just now noticed that the colonel had one hand bandaged, and that another of the men carried his arm in a sling. This, he understood, was the result of his shooting from the closet the previous night.

There appeared to be no limit to the colonel's jesting, and, although Thad was inclined to humor anything of that sort, he finally got tired of it, and was impelled to say:

"Well, colonel, I am sorry to put an end to your innocent amusement, but time is precious. You will have to go with us now."

"Just as you say," replied the other in a chipper voice. "It's a little sad to leave good wine and that sort of thing; but anything to oblige."

But his spirits seemed a trifle dampened when Thad stepped forward and put the irons on him.

There was an appearance of reality about that which was not so cheerful.

He became silent and lost something of his ruddy color, and when the detective left him to handcuff the other three men, the colonel glanced sorrowfully at his slender, white wrists and seemed to shudder at the sight.

The rest were soon shackled, after which they were marched out of the house, into the street.

To the detective's surprise, the captain had sent one of his men out during the parley with the colonel to call a patrol wagon, and it stood in readiness in front of the door.

The colonel blanched and turned red by turns at sight of the ominous vehicle, and finally growled:

"I say, you aren't going to compel us to ride in that horrible affair, I hope?"

"Why not?" asked the detective.

"Call a carriage for me, sir. I shall refuse to ride in an affair intended for common criminals."

"Yes?" said Thad coolly.

"I do, sir."

"Well, my dear sir, in that case, we shall compel you to ride in it. If you had couched your request in a little more polite and gentlemanly language, I should have taken pleasure in accommodating you, but, as it is, I conclude that the treatment of a common criminal is quite good enough for you."

"But, I refuse to enter this vehicle! Suppose any of my aristocratic friends should see me?"

"They are not likely to see you to-night; besides, if they did, it would not be half as bad as they will see later, when you are on trial for your life. Get in!"

"I will not!"

The other three men had already climbed into the wagon, and the colonel cast a contemptuous glance at them as they sat in a row in the van.

"Captain," advised Thad, "it will be necessary to use a little force here."

The captain stepped forward and beckoned a couple of his men, each of whom grasped an arm of the colonel with a view to forcing him into the wagon.

Quicker than thought and with a power that appeared miraculous, the colonel wrenched himself from their grasp, sprung back, and, to the astonishment of every one, his handcuffs dropped from his hands to the

pavement as though they had been stricken off by some miraculous power!

The next instant he drew two revolvers, and, in the twinkling of an eye, fired a half dozen shots, dropping the two policemen who had held him, and wounding a third.

All this had been done so quickly that not one of the crowd, Thad included, had recovered from his surprise before it was all over, and the colonel had disappeared in the darkness, shielded by the crowd that had already begun to gather.

Fortunately some of the policemen had presence of mind enough to keep a watch on the men in the wagon, so that they were not allowed to escape, even if they had tried.

Thad saw that it was no use to waste any time looking for the colonel at that moment, and gave the order for the wagon to drive away with the prisoners they had secured.

The three men, Ludlow, Gonzales and Restelle, were locked in the Tombs, and Thad gave particular directions that they should be closely guarded.

When he had seen them locked in separate cells, the detective returned home.

In the excitement incident to making the arrest and the escape of the colonel, Thad had forgotten all about Martin Summerville, and was somewhat surprised, therefore, when he reached home to find a man standing in front of his stoop.

The detective did not recognize him until he was within a few feet of him, and the fellow put out his hand, accompanied with the salutation:

"Good-morning, Mr. Burr!"

This also reminded Thad that it was a long time after midnight.

"Oh, it's Martin Summerville!" exclaimed the detective.

The fellow was more than surprised at the exclamation. He was surprised that the detective should have known his name, and still more so that he had evinced no astonishment at seeing him (Summerville) there.

He was dumb for a few seconds, but stammered:

"Mr. Burr, you are doubtless surprised to see me here, but—"

"No, I am not surprised to see you here. On the contrary, I expected you," was Thad's rejoinder.

"Expected me?"

The fellow's face was a study of astonishment.

"Yes. When a man promises to be at a certain place, I take it for granted as a rule that he will keep his word."

"I promise—?"

"Yes, you said you were coming," interrupted Thad promptly.

"But—but—" His face was a study of mystery. "I am certain that I never—"

"No, you never told a living soul that you were coming," interposed Thad, enjoying the fellow's bewilderment. "I understand. You only told your soul that you were coming to the detective to give your pals away, but that soul of yours leaks, and I caught the secret."

"You astonish me, sir!" cried the fellow breathlessly. "I did not imagine that a living soul—"

"Except your own. I understand. But, let us not talk out here. You want to see me, I believe?"

"Yes, but—"

"Come into the house," urged Thad, ascending the stoop and putting his key into the lock. "Come in, Mr. Summerville."

Summerville mutely obeyed, and the two men walked back into the detective's "den" at the end of the hall.

When Thad had lighted the gas and the two men were seated, the man-hunter lit a cigar and handed the box to the still bewildered Martin, who took a cigar and lighted it mechanically.

As he did so, he murmured, half-aloud:

"Great man, Mr. Burr. Must have some occult power, like old Ludlow."

"Is old Ludlow endowed with supernatural power?" laughed the detective.

"Undoubtedly—at least we all think so."

"He will have an opportunity of using it now, then."

"So he will, and it will be a miracle if he is ever caught. He has defied the authorities on the other side for forty years, and he has no fear of them on this side."

"He is at present languishing in a cell in the Tombs, just the same."

Martin shook his head dubiously.

"He won't remain there very long," he averred.

"Why not? Do you imagine he can either break out of that prison or bribe the keepers?"

"He will do neither, but he will escape all the same, just as he did before. He is Satan's second."

Thad's curiosity was aroused.

"Tell me," he said. "How did you and he manage to get out before, Mr. Summer-ville?"

"It was very simple. As we went in Ludlow whispered to me and said, 'We will be in here just half an hour, when you will see the keeper come and unlock your cell and tell you to go.' And his words were verified. In just about half an hour the keeper came to my cell and unlocked the door, and I walked out. Ludlow was standing in the corridor, and we left the prison together."

"What did the keeper say when he came to you?"

"Not a word. He appeared to be half-asleep."

A horrible suspicion flashed through Thad's mind.

"Has this man, to your knowledge, the power of hypnotism?" he asked.

"Yes, to the most wonderful degree of any man I ever heard of. He has been known to hypnotize men across the street. I am surprised that he did not hypnotize you, sir. But, I presume you have too powerful a will for him. You say you have arrested him?"

"Yes, and also Gonzales and Restelle."

"But not the colonel?"

"No. The colonel gave us the slip. But I will have him yet."

"Where did you arrest them?"

"In the house, a few minutes after you left."

"Did you see me go?"

"I did."

Thad then explained how he had been concealed behind the curtain during all the scene between him and the colonel, and of the subsequent arrest and the escape of the colonel.

"Yes, we will have no trouble in running him to earth," observed Martin, at the conclusion of the recital. "I know where to find him, and he will not be expecting any one."

"Is he likely to go to this place to night, or this morning, rather?"

"Yes; we had better lose no time in getting there. I have a good deal to say to you, but we had better defer it until you have him safe, as I know he intends leaving the country to-day."

Thad and his companion left the house at once, and, after walking some distance, were fortunate enough to catch a cab, and when they had entered it, Martin gave the order.

After fifteen minutes' drive, Thad was surprised to find himself back at the Second avenue house.

CHAPTER XXIII.

STILL BAFFLED.

THAD was bewildered, and was more than half-suspicious that the ex-tramp was attempting to lead him into a trap, but the fellow's face had an honest and resolute appearance.

Nevertheless the detective was prone to ask:

"You do not expect to find him here, do you?"

"Certainly!" replied Martin, confidently.

"There is no place else he could go. Besides, to one unacquainted with the arrangement of the house, which was for many years occupied by one of your most successful counterfeiters, his hiding-place is as inaccessible as if he were in the center of the earth."

By this time the two men had alighted and approached the house.

"We had better go the back way," suggested Martin.

"Very well," assented the detective. "I have a key to the automatic fireplace."

"We will not need that, as we will go another way."

Nevertheless, Thad found himself mounting the same stairs ten minutes later, and wondered where Martin intended taking him. But he soon discovered.

When they reached the top of the stairs, instead of bothering with the fireplace affair, Martin opened a door in the side of what appeared to be a chimney, and revealed another stairway that led off in another direction.

Simply beckoning his companion to follow, Martin mounted the steps. Thad followed, and in a few moments found himself in a spacious apartment, the outlines of which Thad could make out by the dim light, but before he could make a move his companion grasped him by the arm and whispered:

"Easy! This is his bedroom!"

Thad glanced about, and could make out the form of what appeared to be a bed at one end of the room.

He listened, but could hear no sound.

What could it mean?

Certainly if there was anybody there he could have heard breathing.

Still he listened, and still no sound.

Could it be that the fellow had heard their approach and was prepared to pounce upon them at any moment?

There was but one thing to be done, and that was to make a light.

Thad realized the peril of such a thing under the circumstances, but it was the only alternative.

Drawing his dark lantern from his pocket, he shot the slide.

As the light glowed about the room, he saw that the bed was unoccupied.

Approaching cautiously, he raised the counterpane that hung down close to the floor, and stooping, flashed his light under the bed.

There was no one there.

He next made a careful survey of the rest of the apartment, but to no purpose.

There was clearly nobody there.

Even the closet was searched, but with the same result.

Finally he paused in front of Martin, who had stood intently watching his movements all this time.

The fellow exhibited as much consternation as he himself experienced.

"What does it mean, Martin?" demanded the detective.

Martin shook his head gloomily.

"You know as well as I," he replied. "I could have sworn that he would be here."

"And I was almost as certain that he would not be. It is hardly natural that a man would return to his own house when he is as closely pursued as this man was."

"But he was so confident that nobody could find the way to this place," pleaded Martin. "I have often heard him say that if all the policemen and detectives in the city surrounded the house, he could sleep with perfect serenity in this room with the assurance that he would never be disturbed."

Thad was silent for some moments, and finally asked:

"Is there any other place about the house where he might be in hiding?"

Martin reflected a moment, and then replied:

"There is a vault under the left wing of the house where the former occupant used to do his coining of counterfeit money. He might be there, but if he is, depend upon it, he is not asleep."

"Why?"

"Because, for one thing, there is no place to sleep except on the damp, hard concrete floor; and another thing, he would not feel the same security there that he would here, for there is greater chance of the place being discovered."

"Well, as he is not here, and there is no good of remaining, we may as well pay a visit to the other place. Come, lead the way."

Martin took the lead, and the two men were soon descending the narrow stairway.

When they had reached the basement again, Martin turned off toward one wing of the house, but it was so dark that before he knew what he was about he ran plump against a stone wall.

"A little light, please," he whispered. "I can't get my bearings somehow."

"Won't it be dangerous to make a light here?" suggested Thad.

"No, if he is in the vault he cannot see it, and if he is in this room, he is onto us already."

Thad shot the slide of his lantern and flashed the light in every direction about the room.

Nothing but solid stone was visible.

"Where is the door?" he asked curiously, for the only door to be seen was the one through which they had entered the room.

"I'll soon find that," replied Martin.

"Hold the light in this direction."

Thad did as requested, and as the light flashed along the wall, the fellow began to feel along the stones.

"What do you expect to find there?" demanded the detective, beginning to think by the fellow's actions that he was attempting some ruse to entrap him.

There was clearly no door in that wall, argued the detective, and it looked as though Martin was keeping up this pretense of trying to find one for the purpose of killing time and to throw the detective off his guard and render it possible for some hidden foe to surprise him.

But just as he had arrived at this conclusion and was on the point of declaring his suspicions, Martin exclaimed:

"Here we are!"

And drawing out what appeared to be a long nail from the wall, the next instant swung open a narrow door.

As Thad approached the door he saw that it was not made of stone at all, but of wood which had been carved and painted to resemble the rest of the wall.

"Now we will have to be very cautious," admonished Martin, in a whisper. "If he is in there, he will have the drop on us, and we will have no show."

Thad shut off his light and stepped quickly in, after which Martin closed and fastened the door on the inside.

Having done which, he appeared to be at a standstill what to do next.

Thad was not long in making up his mind what to do, however.

Moving off several paces away from his companion, he drew his revolver and fired directly across the room, and at the same time made a spring of a couple of yards from where he had been standing.

The next instant some one grasped him convulsively by the arm, and it was a full minute before he realized that it was Martin.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

"Who was that fired?" whispered Martin in a tremulous voice.

"It was I, and you came very near getting another charge by coming upon me like that."

"Why did you fire?"

"To find out whether there was anybody in the room or not, you idiot! Now keep close to me, and let us move round to the other side of the room, and if the colonel is here he will either fire at the spot where he saw the flash or attempt to escape through the door."

Martin made no reply, but clung to his arm, and they moved round to the other side of the room, which they succeeded in reaching without encountering any one.

Deeming it safe to risk a light now, Thad shot the slide of his lantern and slowly flashed the light about the room.

As he had expected, from the moment that there had been no response to his shot, there was not a soul in the room except himself and his companion.

Martin looked more discomfited than ever.

"Well, where do you imagine he is now?" asked Thad ironically.

"I give it up," rejoined the other in a discouraged tone. "There is but one other place that he could be, and I can hardly think that he would go there, knowing how easy it would be for any one to find him."

"Where is that?"

"At the doctor's, on Forty-fourth street."

"Nevertheless, there is where he doubtless is," said Thad somewhat irritably. "I do not know why I did not think of that place at first. I might have known that he would not come back here, where he knows we would seek him. We will go to the other house at once, although I have no doubt we are too late now."

So saying, he started for the door.

Martin followed in silence, and it was evident that he was not only discouraged, but deeply hurt by the detective's unkind words.

Not a word passed between them till they reached the cab which they found standing where they had left it, and both men entered.

Thad gave the number of the house in Forty-fourth street, and the cab rolled away.

Half an hour later they arrived at the Forty-fourth street house, and Burr lost no time in ascending the stoop and ringing the bell, which caused the door to be opened by the identical butler who had betrayed him. The latter did not recognize him, of course, and to the detective's inquiry as to whether the doctor was in or not, he replied in the negative.

"When will he be in?" demanded Thad.

"Very soon, I think," replied the negro.

"Is it anything special you want him for?"

"Yes. A friend of his is very ill."

The butler eyed him suspiciously for a moment, and then asked:

"Who?"

"Colonel Swinburn."

As the detective pronounced the words, he watched the effect upon the negro, and noted that his expression was that of apprehension rather than suspicion.

This satisfied Burr of one fact—that the colonel was not in this house, for had he been, the negro would have known that what Thad had said was untrue and would have exhibited the fact by his looks.

"I am very sorry, sah," said the negro, "but I expect the doctor back every minute. Won't ye come in an' wait?"

The two men stepped inside, and as the butler closed the door, he observed, as though speaking to himself:

"Really, I thought the doctah and the cunnel was together."

"Together?" interposed Thad.

"Yes, sah. They lef' heah together."

"How long ago?"

"Oh, it was this evenin', 'bout six o'clock."

"Did they say where they were going?"

"I undahstood that they was goin' to the cunnel's house, sah."

"On Second avenue, near second street?"

"Yes, sah."

"Did they say when they would probably be back?"

"The doctah said he'd be back 'bout mid-night, or a little aftah."

"It's a good deal after now."

"I know it is, sah."

"Did the colonel intend to come back with him?"

Up to this moment the negro never appeared to suspect that Thad had any other motive for questioning him than that which he pretended, but when he asked whether the colonel intended to return with the doctor, the fellow suspected that something was wrong.

"I thought you wanted the doctah to go see the cunnel," opening his eyes very wide.

Thad saw that he had made a mistake in his eagerness to get at the facts, but contrived to turn it off pretty well.

"So I do," he replied, calmly.

"Wal, ain't the cunnel at home?"

"Certainly. And that is the reason I asked you if he had signified his intention of returning here with the doctor, for if he had, I thought it possible that the doctor might call at the colonel's house, in which event I should be saved the inconvenience of waiting."

The negro was still a trifle suspicious, but at that moment he caught a glimpse of Martin for the first time, and, recognizing him and knowing that he had been a friend of the colonel and doctor, his suspicion vanished.

"Yes, sah," he finally replied, "I think he did intend to come back with the doctah. But Mr. Snmmahville there ought to know; he was with them."

This put Martin in a quandary for a moment.

He had not expected to be called upon in the matter, and was at a loss how to answer for some seconds, but he finally made out to falter out:

"Yes, I was with them—but—but—I had to go on an errand, and when I got back to

the colonel's house the doctor had gone and the colonel was very ill. I wanted to go for a physician nearer by, but he insisted upon us coming here. However, he may have recovered and come up here with the doctor. I know he is in mortal dread of the police raiding his house to-night. You are sure that he is not here, are you, Sam?"

"Who, the doctah?"

"Yes, and the colonel."

"Yes, sah, I'm suah they ain't heah."

The detective saw that there was no use of disguising his purpose any longer, and said:

"Nevertheless there will be no harm in searching the house, and the first thing I shall do will be to put you where you will do no harm, Sam."

With that he leveled his revolver on the negro, and continued:

"Put out your hands while I put the nippers on you."

The butler was too much taken by surprise and too badly frightened to think of resisting, and did as he was ordered.

When the handcuffs were snapped upon his wrists, Burr remarked:

"This is in part payment for the little game of treachery you played on me the other night, old fellow. It may teach you the lesson that you cannot play the traitor with everybody with impunity."

The negro was speechless for a whole minute, and the truth began to dawn upon him.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated at length. "You's dat same fellow what was blacked up like er culled man the udder night, ain't ye?"

"I shouldn't wonder," laughed Burr.

"Sakes alive! If I'd a-knowd dat, you-all's'd a nevah got into dis house!"

"I am aware of that fact, my colored friend, and that is the reason I playcd the little trick that I did. By the way, you still have a chance to redeem yourself."

"How's dat?" gasped the negro eagerly.

"Tell me the plain truth as to whether the colonel is hiding in this house or not, or if he is not, where he is. If you will do that, I will set you at liberty. If not, down you go to the police station to be locked up with the doctor and old Ludlow."

"Are they lock up, sah?"

"They are. In fact, the whole gang, except the colonel, is locked up in the Tombs." At this the negro glanced inquiringly at Martin.

"Never mind him," interposed Thad. "He is not one of them."

"He was, sah, and done as much deviltry as any of 'em."

"Never mind, I will attend to him. But you haven't answered my question as to whether the colonel is hiding in this house or not."

"No, sah, he is not," replied the butler in a tremulous voice.

"Are you sure?"

"I hope I may die!"

"At all events, there will be no harm in searching. But you can save me the trouble and yourself the pain of going to prison by telling me where he is, if you know."

"I declare to goodness, I don't know, sah."

"Very well, we will search the house, and if we find you have told the truth, I may release you; but if you have told me a lie, woe be unto you!"

The detective then pushed the negro into the parlor and locked him in, after which he and Martin began their search of the house.

First beginning with the basement, the kitchen and dining-room were gone through, after which the servants' room, which, by the way, was deserted, was searched. Finding no one on this floor, they proceeded to the first floor, and here every room was searched, with the same result that they had met with in the basement.

As they were ascending the stairs to the second floor, they were startled by the sound of shuffling feet as of some one trying to escape.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SECRET OUT AT LAST.

At the sound of the shuffling feet Thad and his companion increased their gait, and in another moment were on the next floor.

The halls were in darkness, so that nothing could be seen, so pausing at the top of the landing, Thad put his hand back and grasped his companion as an indication that he wished him to stop.

He then listened intently for several seconds, but nothing more could be heard.

"Draw your pistol and wait here, Martin," he whispered, "and see that no one makes his escape, while I search the rooms."

"Great Heaven! You are not going to venture in there alone, are you?" whispered the other.

"Certainly. We have had nonsense enough about this thing. I propose to bring it to an end at once, at all hazards."

"Do as you think best," sighed Martin, "but I hope you know whom you are dealing with when you tackle Colonel Swinburn."

Thad made no response, and moved softly away into the darkness.

All apprehension of clandestine attack had left him.

He had but the one thought in his mind, and that was to capture his man, cost what it might.

He moved softly along the hall till he came to the first door, which he found by feeling along the wall.

Trying the knob, he found the door was not locked, and he opened it and stepped in.

Here the darkness was, if possible, more intense than it was in the hall.

He paused and listened.

It was deathly still.

He knew that nobody could be in that room, for in that intense stillness he could have heard the lightest breathing, and his mind was made up what to do.

Drawing the slide of his lantern with a rapid movement, he flooded the room with light.

Quickly he moved the halo of the lantern about the room and searched every nook and corner, but there was not a living being in sight.

There were two closets in the room, and these he was not long in searching also, but without result.

At the end of five minutes after he entered the room he had satisfied himself that there was nobody there, and did not waste any time in speculation, but re-entered the hall.

With his lantern still glowing, he had no trouble in finding the remaining rooms, three in number, and made the same careful search of them that he had of the first, but at the end of half an hour he returned to his guard at the head of the stairs with the discouraging information that his search had been fruitless.

"Just as I expected," replied Martin. "Still, there is another story to search. But my opinion is that what the butler told us is true."

"That there is no one here, eh?"

"Yes."

"I begin to think so myself, but what was that noise we heard?"

"It might have been cats. The doctor has a lot of them. You will probably find them when you go up-stairs."

"Well, you remain where you are, and I will go up and see what there is up there."

A moment later the detective was reconnoitering the upper floor.

His first discovery was a verification of Martin's prophecy, in the shape of a half-dozen large cats that came bounding out of one corner of the hall, and went dashing down-stairs like a whirlwind, making as much noise as a couple of men would have done.

This satisfied him that the noise he had heard on first coming up was that of the cats making their way up to the top floor.

There were four rooms on this floor, and he was not long in searching them, but at the end of it all, he descended to his companion with the information that he, too, was satisfied of the truthfulness of the negro's assertion.

"Still, I believe he knows where the colonel is, if he wants to tell," observed Thad.

"Perhaps when he sees that you are in earnest about taking him to prison he will weaken," suggested Martin.

"I will see."

When Burr got down-stairs he was treated to two surprises. The first one was the

finding the door of the parlor unlocked, and the other was that, when he entered the parlor, the negro had his handcuffs off.

"What does this mean?" demanded the detective.

"Don't git 'cited, sah, an' I'll tell ye all 'bout it," rejoined the butler. "You was hardly out o' sight goin' down to the basement, when the cunnel come in, unlocked the door and tuck the irons off me. Den he wanted me to go with him, but I put him off. I tole him dat I would stay heah and tell you-alls dat he'd lef' town, an' den I'd come to his house."

Thad was a little loth to accept this story at first, but the negro appeared so honest about it, and the door being unlocked and his handcuffs off corroborated it to some extent, so he asked:

"Where is he now?"

"Gone home."

"To the house in Second avenue?"

"Yes, sah."

"You are positive of this?"

"Dead suah, foh he expects dat I'll come down dere to go with him in the morning. If you-alls don't believe me, ye kin handcuff me ag'in, an' take me along."

"Well, I'll trust you this time, but remember, if you deceive me, I will have no mercy on you."

Two minutes later Thad and Martin were again in the cab and driving with all speed toward the down-town house.

Twenty minutes later they alighted and entered, as they had before, through the back way.

"We had better go directly to the sleeping-room up-stairs," suggested Martin. "He will be sure to be there."

They crept softly up the narrow stairs, and in another minute were once more in the secret chamber.

It was very dark, and the detective paused on the threshold.

He listened, and could hear breathing.

"That is he," whispered Martin. "Flash your light and do your work quickly before he wakes."

Thad drew out his dark lantern and shot the slide.

As the light glowed over the room he could see the colonel peacefully reposing in a bed at the opposite end of the room.

A moment later the invincible crook-chaser was at the bedside, drew his revolver and tapped the sleeper on the forehead with it.

The colonel sprang up and grasped his own revolver which was under his pillow, meanwhile staring with a dazed expression at the man before him.

"No use, colonel," warned Thad. "I've got you this time, and I am willing to wager something that you will not give me the slip again. Get up!"

Swinburn got up and dressed himself without demur. Then Thad placed the handcuffs on him, but they were the kind known as "nippers," provided with teeth, so that when the criminal attempts to slip them off the teeth enter the flesh.

"I imagine you will have some difficulty in removing those," the detective suggested.

But the colonel paid no attention to the remark. His eyes were fixed upon Martin at that moment, and he seemed to be trying to bore holes in him with his blazing eyes.

"So, this is your revenge, is it, Martin Summerville?"

"Yes, colonel," replied the other bravely. "You have crushed me long enough. Now it is my inning."

"Very well! it will be my turn next," returned the colonel, vengefully.

"Your turn will never come. I have all the evidence, or at least the detective here has, and you will swing for your crimes. Besides that, we have the will, which will give Hortense Swinburn her rights, the property you have been trying to get possession of so long, through so many crimes."

"What do you expect to gain, you infamous traitor!"

"That is a har! word, colonel, but I will not resent an insult from a man of your stamp. If I am a traitor, you have made me so. I stood by you until you drove me to desperation by your cruelty and neglect; then I betrayed you, as I should have done long ago. You know I would not do all your bidding. I refused to do your worst work, and am happy to-day to say that I

never soiled my hands with the blood of one of your victims, nor have I ever committed any crime for which the law can touch me, except the part I took in the abduction of Hortense, and I shall confess that like a man."

The colonel was silent.

"I know," continued Martin, "that if I had done your work so that you would not have been compelled to hire those other assassins, I might have had gold, but I would rather have my clear conscience at this moment and be penniless as I am, than to have all your gold and your terrible weight of guilt."

The colonel preserved his silence up to that moment, and then it appeared that he could contain himself no longer.

"I suppose you imagine that Hortense will forgive you out of gratitude for what you have sacrificed for her, and marry and divide her fortune with you?" he sneered.

"I expect nothing of the kind. I am not worthy of Hortense, and could not accept it if she were to offer it. I am and never can be anything else but an outcast, unworthy of any of my relatives, except you. As for you, Albert Swinburn, I am a thousand times better than you, for I am an innocent man, while you are red with crime—a murderer!"

The colonel hung his head, and made no reply.

Martin did not appear inclined to say more, and the detective spoke:

"Come, colonel, we must be going."

Swinburn made no resistance, and marched before the detective down the stairs and out of the house.

When the street was reached he looked about with a scowl, evidently expecting to see the detested patrol-wagon, and appeared to be agreeably surprised that it was nowhere in sight.

Thad hurried him into the cab which he had kept waiting for them, and, twenty minutes later, the colonel was fast locked in a cell in the Tombs.

Breakfast was ready when Thad and his companion got back to the house, and after making their toilets, they repaired to the dining-room.

Miss Swinburn was already seated when they entered, and it was not until then that the detective thought of the probable embarrassment that would attend the meeting of the two former lovers, but it was too late now to alter the arrangements, and he marched straight in, followed by Martin.

It is doubtful whether Martin expected to find the girl at the table, for he stopped short at sight of her and changed color.

But, to Thad's surprise, Hortense looked up and met the face of her cousin without apparent recognition.

Thad was in a quandary how to proceed, but, after a moment's reflection, he decided that it might as well be over one time as another, and, stepping forward, said:

"Miss Swinburn, this is Mr. Martin Summerville."

The girl blushed violently but exhibited no indication of fainting as she had done twice before at mention of his name. She bowed and smiled faintly, and Martin took a seat at the table.

"Miss Swinburn," began the man-taker, as breakfast progressed, "I am happy to announce to you that your enemies are all under lock and key."

"All?" she echoed, doubtfully, darting a glance toward Martin.

"Yes, all. And we must thank your cousin, here, for a good part of it, as well as for recovering the will, which will restore your property to you and your family."

She looked up with almost a frightened face, and her eyes wandered again to the face of her cousin.

She did not speak, and her breast heaved with emotion.

Martin was equally embarrassed and oppressed with emotion, but he finally faltered:

"Yes, cousin, I did this. It was not much to do, but my conscience was relieved somewhat by doing something as an offset against all the wrongs you have suffered at the hands of my family. I only hope that you may have peace and happiness in future, now that the last disturbing elements are beyond the power of wrong-doing and you have the property which they have criminally kept you out of so long."

Her eyes filled with tears.

For a long time she seemed unable to speak, but finally murmured almost incoherently:

"But you—you—are—still my—enemy?"

"No, cousin, and never have been. I have been forced into some things by the pressure of circumstances which I would not have done of my own volition, but I have never intentionally wronged you, and for the future, if you will allow me, I shall be most happy to be your friend."

The girl was again overcome by her feelings, and the tears fell fast from her eyes.

"But you were with the party who buried me alive?" she faltered at last, apparently determined to find some excuse for accusing him.

"I was, but it was no fault of mine. Old Ludlow got me drunk, as he usually did when he wanted me to do anything, and I did not realize what I was doing."

Her face brightened.

"I am so glad to know that you have never intentionally persecuted me, cousin, for I always—"

She paused and grew very red.

There was an awkward silence, and then she looked up with an arch smile and said:

"But you say the will has been recovered? How did that happen, and where is it?"

"It is in the little bronze casket in Mr. Burr's possession. I took it from the colonel and sold it for a mere trifle to a second-hand dealer in the city and Mr. Burr purchased it."

"Why did you sell it to the second-hand dealer, Martin?" asked the girl, growing confidential.

Martin did not reply at once, but appeared to be reflecting how he would answer.

"Well, I presume I may as well relate the whole story," he began at length. "It will serve to clear up a good deal of mystery. When you and Uncle Bardwell returned from England Colonel Swinburn followed you."

"On the same vessel?" interrupted the girl.

"Yes. He was in disguise, so that you would not know him. The colonel had hired a man to put uncle out of the way—a Cuban named Gonzales. The latter made uncle's acquaintance while on board the ship, but found no opportunity of accomplishing his purpose. As soon as they landed Gonzales hunted up a man of his acquaintance by the name of Ludlow, who has a most marvelous power of hypnotism. To him he communicated the plot, and they discussed the most feasible way of accomplishing uncle's murder."

"Ludlow suggested that he might hypnotize Uncle Bardwell, and put the idea of suicide into his head, and that led to a bright idea, as he thought, on the part of Gonzales, who is a physician. 'Make him think he has consumption,' suggested Gonzales, 'and I will prescribe for him.' 'Poison?' asked the other. 'No, simple calomel.' 'What will that do?' demanded Ludlow, doubtfully. 'Never mind,' returned Gonzales. 'When he gets to taking the calomel, make him imagine he has a hemorrhage some night, and I will prescribe a teaspoonful of table salt.' 'What will that do?' asked the other, still doubtfully. 'Why, don't you see, as soon as the calomel and salt mix it becomes corrosive sublimate. The man will expire in a few minutes, and all the doctors and policemen in Christendom can never discover the cause of death, beyond the fact that he was poisoned.' And so the thing was accomplished."

"The next thing the colonel desired was to get you out of the way, cousin, but he was not satisfied with having you killed. He wanted to torture you as much as possible in punishment for not accepting his proposition, years ago."

"He knew that I was hanging about the city and looked me up. He saw that I was in rags and believed he could use me as a tool. He made the proposition that I should come to you and pretend that I was your friend, and then lead you into his clutches. This I refused to do at first, but thinking that it might lead to my being able to assist you, I consented to go into the scheme."

"From the first I was determined to betray him, but did not have the courage to do it, or see a way to go about it. But when I got

into his house (which, by the way, is your house now, cousin), I began to notice various articles marked with the 'Swinburn-Summerville-Separare' brand, and then saw my way clear. I knew he had sent a letter to uncle and one to Mr. Burr with the mark of the Scarlet Brand on, and I knew that if Mr. Burr got hold of any of the articles and saw the mark he would soon trace the origin and get on the colonel's track.

"I knew Mr. Burr by sight—Gonzales pointed him out to me, and one day I saw him enter the second-hand place on Third avenue. On inquiry I learned that he was in the habit of visiting the place quite frequently, so I lost no time in getting a couple of the marked articles out of the house and selling them to the old Irishman who keeps the place. As I had hoped, the detective came along the same day and picked them up."

"Let me interrupt you a moment," said Thad. "It was not for gain that you sold the articles, then?"

"No, sir, not at all. It was to give you a clue."

"Allow me to ask you another question: You spoke of this peculiar mark as the Swinburn-Summerville-Separare sign or brand. What is the meaning of that, and what was its origin?"

"It originated many years—many generations, I should say, ago, when the feud first sprung up in the family. I do not know what the origin of the quarrel was, but I know that, prior to that time, the Swinburns and Summervilles had been on the best of terms and were intermarried to a great extent, but when the quarrel took place, one branch—the branch to which I belonged—altered the crest which was formerly 'Swinburn-Summerville-Unis,' to 'Swinburn-Summerville-Separare,' which, of course, meant divided, and whenever they contemplated perpetrating an outrage on the other branch they would put the three S's on the head of a letter to be sent to them, and mark the body, usually the forehead, by means of a small stamp and an indelible chemical, the discovery of one of our ancestors."

"How did they manage to put it on without the knowledge of the person on whom it was placed?" asked the detective.

"It was usually done while the intended victim was asleep, but sometimes while they would be engaged in an altercation, the party with the brand would strike the other a smart blow on the temple with the brand in his hand and it would leave the indelible impression."

"I do not know whether you noticed it or not, but the holster pistols which I bought of old Mike had the name of John Ludlow as the maker. Had that Ludlow anything to do with the old man whom I arrested last night?"

"None that I know of," replied Martin.

"It is probably only a coincidence, then?"

"I presume so. At least I never heard of a Ludlow in the family, did you, cousin?"

"Yes," responded the girl. "If I am not mistaken, the will which we were speaking of was made by a certain John Ludlow, gun-maker, of Sheffield, who was an ancestor of ours."

A subsequent examination of the will proved this to be a fact, and it was also learned on the trial of Colonel Swinburn and his accomplice that the present John Ludlow was a renegade descendant of the gun-maker, and consequently a relative of the Swinburns and Summervilles.

There was no trouble in finding ample evidence against the colonel and his accomplices, and they were condemned to die.

The long-separated lovers learned again to love each other and the long-delayed wedding took place with Thad Burr as one of the witnesses.

They were profuse in their thanks to the brave, kind detective for restoring their happiness and once more uniting a family which had so long been rent asunder by one of the cruellest vendettas the world ever knew.

Nor was the detective forgotten in the matter of his reward.

As soon as Hortense came into her property she promptly handed over the fifty thousand dollars which her cousin had promised.

THE END.

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